

Taliban make advance towards Salang

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Afghanistan's Taliban have made advances against opposition fighters about eighty kilometers north of Kabul, reports VOA.

The radio said that Taliban have advanced south to Baghlan province to near the northern entrances of the Salang tunnel which connects southern Afghanistan to its northern provinces. At least a dozen people have been killed in two days of fighting. The fighting comes days after international donors told both warring groups that aid may stop if fresh hostilities break out.

The Taliban control ninety percent of Afghanistan and have been unable to dislodge the opposition from the remaining part of the country. Repeated international attempts to broker peace between the two sides have failed.

Meanwhile, a top aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin is standing by his warning that Russia will launch air strikes against Afghanistan if it gives support to Chechen fighters.

Kremlin's spokesman Sergei Askonshky repeated that Russia is not ruling out attacks on what he called suspected Islamic terrorist bases in Afghanistan.

No decision on the issue of wheat subsidy

The Federal Government has not

taken any decision on the issue of wheat subsidy, Food and Agriculture Ministry official said.

Commenting on the reports about deferment of abolition of wheat subsidy, published in a section of Press, he said that the federal government has not communicated any instructions to the provinces in this regard.

The sources said that the provinces were providing subsidy on wheat since long on the directives of Federal Government and more than Rs 10 billion are being spent on it.

Sindh and NWFP has demanded of the Federal Government to withdraw subsidy on wheat from the next fiscal year to overcome its financial burden.

The Punjab is not in favour of withdrawal of subsidy on wheat and requested the federal government not to take such decision.

The sources said that the subsidy on wheat is continue and the Federal Government is likely to announce uniform policy on the issue of wheat subsidy when required.

The Punjab and Sindh has not started wheat releases to the flour mills while NWFP and Balochistan are providing wheat to the mills on small scale. The matter of subsidy is linked with the releases to the flour mills, the sources added.

Heavy fighting erupts in north Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, May 22: A new round of fighting erupted in northern Afghanistan on Monday as opposition forces launched a counter-attack against Taliban troops in the northern Salang area, a report here said.

The pre-dawn attack mounted by the forces of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood was "very heavy," the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported. "Both sides are using tanks and artillery," the private news service said.—AFP

DAWN

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Moscow's threat

THE belligerent assertion, reiterated on the second consecutive day, by Russian President's top spokesman on Chechnya that Moscow would not rule out attacking suspected Islamic "terrorist" bases in Afghanistan, in case they threatened Russia's national interests or the national interests of countries of the region, which have friendly relations with it, has rightly elicited criticism from the United States, Pakistan as well as Kabul, not to speak of the alarm expressed by the opposition forces within Russia itself that such a threat, if executed, could widen the Chechen conflict. Sergei Yastrzhembsky's remark that for taking out the Chechen guerrilla training camps there was no need of an armed intervention against the Taliban, was clearly indicative of the possibility of a resort to air strikes. An Afghan spokesman has categorically denied that his country was providing training facilities to the Chechen fighters. Nor had it, he said, agreed to render them military assistance which it had been accused of doing, adding that Kabul had accorded recognition to Chechnya on political and moral grounds and would continue to give it diplomatic support. The spokesman of the Pakistan Foreign Office, while highlighting the destabilising impact that such air strikes would have on the region, referred to the recent Afghan Interior Minister's visit to Islamabad in which he had given the assurance, on behalf of *Mullah Umar*, that Afghanistan was against terrorism and would not allow anyone to use its territory for hostile acts against any country. Washington has repeated its point of view that the Kremlin should "pursue something other than a military solution" because the Chechen crisis could not be resolved through the use of force.

Ever since President Yeltsin handed over the mantle of power to him, Vladimir Putin has been displaying a tough and uncompromising posture in handling issues of national importance. The people of Russia, smarting under the feeling of a humiliating loss of superpower status and an ineffective, vacillating stint of Yeltsin rule, welcomed his ruthless campaign, reminiscent of his KGB past, in the Caucasian republic. His success at the polls where he bagged more than the required 50 per cent in the first round was assured. The expression of hawkish intent by his spokesman in pursuing the Chechen fighters wherever they might be has to be seen in the context of Russians' desire to project their country as powerful enough to have its way, even if it involved stepping on other's toes in the process. But the ground realities since it occupied Afghanistan for ten painful years before it was made to beat a shameful retreat have radically changed. Whatever the real purpose – demolishing the so-called training camps or bolstering the morale of the Northern Alliance – Moscow should be well advised not to underestimate the Taliban and to reconsider its moves in the interest of peace and avoid having a recourse to action that is fraught with dangerous consequences for the region. Having failed to completely subdue the Chechens, it should heed the counsel of adopting a peaceful approach to solving the problem, rather than pursuing an ever-evasive goal of scoring a military victory. The best course for Russia would be to put its own house in order and not court further trouble in pursuit of imagined national interests or the interests of friendly countries in the region.

Russia defends right to strike Afghan

MOSCOW (AFP) - Moscow on Thursday dismissed reports that it had backed down from threats to bomb suspected terrorist camps in Afghanistan out of respect for Washington's critical view of such strikes.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov told Russian journalists on the sidelines of a NATO meeting in Florence that Afghanistan was not discussed during his meeting Wednesday with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

"This issue was not raised," Ivanov told Interfax on Thursday. Russia's top diplomat added that "various scenarios are possible" in Russia's response to Afghanistan, whose ruling Taliban coalition is accused by Moscow of assisting rebels in the separatist Russian republic of Chechnya. "We shall act depending on how the situation develops," said Ivanov.

Russia has accused the Taliban of training guerrillas who are fighting for independence in Chechnya and of supporting militants in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

Senior Russian defence sources said Wednesday that Moscow had already mapped out a contingency

strategy for strikes against bases in Afghanistan.

But a US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Ivanov had privately told Albright that "no such actions would be contemplated" by Moscow.

Albright in turn expressed her concern at the prospect that Russia's war in Chechnya could spread to other countries in the region, the US official said.

Washington finds itself in a tricky position because it launched a cruise missile attack in 1998 against suspected terrorist training grounds in Afghanistan.

And like Moscow, Washington is hunting for the Saudi terrorist suspect Osama bin Laden, who is currently based in Afghanistan. Most defence analysts interpret Moscow's threats as saber rattling that is unlikely to lead to an attack that could prompt the Taliban militia to retaliate by attacking neighboring former Soviet republics.

Afghanistan also remains deeply ingrained in the Russian psyche following Moscow's ill-fated intervention in the mountainous state from 1979-89 to back up the Communist regime there.

According to official estimates,

some 14,000 Soviet troops died in the campaign that proved deeply unpopular at home and strained Moscow's ties with the West.

"Afghanistan is our neighbor," cautioned former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who oversaw the troop withdrawal.

"It's a country with which we have our own history of relations and long years of cooperation. There was an adventure for which we have paid a dear price. We thoughtlessly entered that country and then got out with enormous losses," Gorbachev told Interfax.

The debate over Russian strikes comes on the eve of a June 3-5 Moscow summit between US President Bill Clinton and Russia's newly-elected Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin.

The two leaders' talks are already expected to be complicated by a dispute over US plans to build a nuclear defence shield and Moscow's human rights record during the eight-month Chechen war.

The United States has repeatedly urged Moscow to launch political dialogue with the rebels, but Putin has countered that Russia had no intention of negotiating with terrorists.



CHECHNYA: Russian soldiers of the paratroopers' scout detachment look for separatist armed groups in the southern mountainous forest area of Chechnya.-AFP

NATION 26 MAY 2000

'Loya Jirga only option to end Afghan crisis'

ISLAMABAD (APP) - The only option of convening a Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) of all Afghans can provide a way out to the continuing Afghan impasse and to bring a lasting peace to the war-torn land.

The idea of Loya Jirga, "a grass roots" proposal which drew force from Afghan traditions and history. This is not group-oriented, "like the previous efforts," the former Deputy Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Kamal Karazi claimed in an interview with APP here Sunday.

He opined the earlier efforts of the UN ran aground because of their more emphasis on groups rather than empowering the Afghan people for settlement of the issue.

Grand Assembly, he opined, is the only forum that can bring Afghans together.

Former Afghan monarch Zahir Shah, leading an exile life in Rome, has supported the idea by agreeing to play a role for return of an elusive peace to Afghanistan.

Karazi claimed the proposal of Loya Jirga had already been supported by the US.

"We have had support from the European countries," including Germany and Italy. He hoped the rest will also give practical support in this regard. He expected all the regional countries would do the same as it was necessary for restoration of a durable peace in Afghanistan.

Karazi said, "We want a solution under which every body is involved including the warring factions, the political organizations, representatives of the chiefs of tribes, former Jehadi commanders," he said.

The Decision Making Council of the Loya Jirga constituted by 200

king of Afghanistan himself had inaugurated meeting of the Grand Assembly in Rome in November last year which had the blessings of the Italian Government. Italian Deputy Foreign Minister was present at the meeting of Loya Jirga.

Karazi said the UN should support the initiative of the Loya Jirga because it is the only viable option to restore peace and stability in Afghanistan.

"I hope Pakistan will support the proposal of Loya Jirga. Its support to the proposal will help a lot," he said.

"A subtle Government chosen by the people of Afghanistan is the best guarantee of the peace and security for Pakistan," Karazi said. There is visit Pakistan and other Afghan neighbours to secure their support," he added.

At least five meetings of Loya Jirga

ga had already been held in this regard both at Islamabad, Istanbul, Bonn and in Rome during last two years when asked what failed Afghans to bring peace after their historic success to force Russian out of their land, Karazi said basically there were two reasons.

"The inability of the Afghans Mujahideen to have a political vision for the future of the country and to recognize that this country belongs to all Afghans. If we are it together, we will be Afghans."

He said a broad former to diplomat, The broad reason was an outside interference in internal affairs of Afghanistan.

Karazi said the situation was further complicated, "by the lack of interest by major powers, specially by the European and the United States," after the Soviet withdrawal," in 1989.

Strong quake jolts Pakistan, Afghanistan

KABUL (AFP) - An earthquake measuring 5.8 on the Richter scale jolted the Afghan capital and surrounding provinces early Saturday but there were no reports of casualties, residents and officials said.

Tremors lasting several seconds were felt around 4 am (2330 GMT Friday), residents said.

The earthquake also shook a wide area in Pakistan's northwest region bordering Afghanistan but no human or material losses were reported.

The Pakistani seismological department said the quake measured 5.8 on the international Richter Scale with the epicentre located 200 kilometers northwest of Peshawar in the Hindukush range in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has no seismological facilities to measure the magnitude or locate the epicentre of earthquakes.

A spokesman for Afghan opposition forces which control quake-prone northeastern regions said they also felt the quake but knew of no casualties.

"We also felt the quake, but thankfully no casualties or destruction has been reported yet," said Sayed Hussain Anwar, an opposition official.

The Bakhtar Information Agency of the ruling Taliban militia also reported no loss of life or damage.

Afghanistan has been rocked by several earthquakes in the past three years which have claimed 9,000 lives, mostly in northern Takhar and Badakhshan and the central Wardak province.

NATION

14 MAY 2000

NATION 01 MAY 2000

07 MAY 2000

NATION

'Loya Jirga only solution to Afghan problem'

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - While demanding the establishment of Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) and convening its meeting on emergency basis, the moderate National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) has claimed that this was the only way for resolving the long awaited Afghan problem.

Through its official communication issued here on Saturday, he said that the NIFA, in accordance with this political framework had taken many initiatives.

First Pir Syed Ahmad Gillani, a central leader of NIFA travelled to Kandahar for a meeting with the leaders of Taliban movement in June 1996.

In addition to meeting the supreme leader of Taliban Mohammad Omar Mujahid, Pir Syed Gillani had one to one meeting with each and every member of the supreme ruling council of the Taliban.

The meeting was conducted in an amiable atmosphere and the situation in the country was discussed in depth.

In continuation to the first get-together, there was another meeting between Pir Gillani and Mulla Rabbani, the chairman of the executive council of Taliban in Islamabad. It is to be noted here that the NIFA had followed its goal for peaceful solution of the problems

of Afghanistan based on national interest and the wishes of the majority of the people of Afghanistan.

The focal point of these meeting had always been the current situation in the country and how to narrow the gap between the policies and solutions proposed by NIFA.

It is worth mentioning here that the history of Afghanistan, in general, and the experiences of the last 22 years in particular, had prove that use of force, cannot bring peace, stability and prosperity of the people of Afghanistan. Imposing one's authority by use of force in Afghanistan has caused lots of destruction to the country. Taliban who control almost 90 per cent of the land are unable to provide a complete solution to the ongoing conflict.

The isolation of Afghanistan by the international community and the imposition of sanctions by the United Nations on the ruling faction in Afghanistan has caused a lot of hardships to the common poor people of Afghanistan.

Therefore the efforts of NIFA to establish and keep contacts with all sides in the conflict for finding a durable and acceptable solution, from within Afghanistan, through such means as Loya Jirga, is a continuous process.

The national Islamic Front of

Afghanistan has come to the conclusion that under the prevailing circumstances in the country and the overall geopolitical situation, of the region, imposition of solution from outside of the country is mere wastage of time.

Considering the above mentioned conclusions and analysis, NIFA took one more step on April 19-20, 2000 in the city of Jalalabad a meeting took place between high ranking officials of the NIFA and Taliban administration.

The NIFA delegation consist of Syed Salman Gillani, Abdu Wakil Akbarzai, Mawlawi Qasin Khan and A.Karim Khorrami led by the organisation Deputy leader Syed Hamed Gillani; the Taliban delegation was led by Mullah Amir Khan Mutaqi Minister for Education.

The acting Governor of Ningarhar province who is the security in-charge of the eastern province of Afghanistan was also a member of the Taliban delegation.

This two-day meeting was conducted in a friendly atmosphere and covered all aspects of the situation in Afghanistan. This meeting can be considered as a first step for paving the way for further in-depth and meaningful negotiations, inside Afghanistan, for achieving peace and stability in the country.

UN role urged for calling Loya Jirga meeting on Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - The Afghan National Defender Islamic Front has called upon the United Nations to take early steps for convening a meeting of the traditional Afghan Loya Jirga which is the sole hope for return of the peace in Afghanistan.

The front has made this demand through a memorandum, which was presented by its chief Mr. Shan Badshah Shinwari to the UNO Secretary General Special Representative for Afghanistan Mr. Francis Vendarral.

Through such a memorandum, after describing in depth miseries of the Afghans, the front has also asked the forums like UNO, OIC and 6+2 to meet its responsibilities.

The Front has also diverted in depth the human rights abuses in Afghanistan and alleged that Taliban are involved in state terrorism with harassing and terrorising the civilians.

The UNO and other global forums have been asked to force Taliban for honouring the human

rights and let the Afghans to get education and enjoy medical care in state hospitals.

The Front has announced its whole hearted support in favour of former king Mohammad Zahir Shah peace initiatives and stated it a realistic approach for resolving of the conflict. It urged all foreign, regional and neighbouring countries to stop interferences in affairs of Afghanistan and let the Afghans to build up a consensus amongst them for finding out a solution to their internal problems.

DAWN

07 MAY 2000

Afghan group for convening Loya Jirga

ISLAMABAD, May 6: The National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) on Saturday renewed call for convening traditional Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) to find a solution to problems in Afghanistan.

A statement issued by the NIFA said the Loya Jirga was the only way to demonstrate the aspirations and will of the people of Afghanistan.

"The NIFA has come to the conclusion that in view of the prevailing circumstances in the country and the overall geopolitical situation of the region, imposition of solutions from outside the country was a mere waste of time and effort.

Whatever solution was proposed should have 100 per cent homogeneous character and should come from within Afghanistan," the statement added.

It said the only way to reach a sound and durable solution to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan was through peaceful means and with full participation of the majority of the people of Afghanistan.

The statement said use of force could neither settle the Afghan problem nor bring peace, stability and prosperity to the people of Afghanistan. It said imposing one's authority by use of force in Afghanistan had caused a lot of destruction to the country and devastating results to all the segments of society.

AFGHAN ISSUE DISCUSSED: Taliban minister for education Mulla Amir Khan Muttaqi has discussed Afghan issue with leaders of National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) in Islamabad, a NIFA statement said on Saturday.

The meeting was in continua-

tion of the series of talks between Taliban and NIFA, the statement said, adding that the two sides agreed to continue talks in future.

The deputy chief of NIF Sayed Hamed Gilani led his team in the talks while Afghan ambassador Sayed Mohammad Haqqani accompanied the Taliban minister.

Taliban ambassador Mohammad Haqqani told the meeting that the details of Jalalabad meeting have been conveyed to the Taliban higher authorities and expressed the appreciation of the Taliban higher authorities over it. He added that Taliban leadership lauded peace efforts of the NIFA.

They agreed that higher authorities of both the sides will hold a meeting in the light of peace and establishment of a system.—NNI

People flee drought-stricken region in Afghanistan

KABUL (AFP) - The entire population of the Registan desert in southern Afghanistan has fled as a drought, described as the worst in 30 years, hit the war-ravaged country, a UN report said Wednesday.

It said the hardest hit areas were Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan and Nimroz provinces.

But it expressed concern over possible scarcity of food and fodder all over Afghanistan as a moderate drought was affecting much of the rest of the country.

The United Nations report said inhabitants of the Registan desert migrated after their water sources dried up.

It did not give a figure but Abdul Hai Muttaen, a spokesman for the ruling Taliban militia, said around 300,000 families had been evacuated from Registan to neighbouring Herat and other adjacent provinces.

The UN said owners of livestock, especially nomads and farmers dependent on rainfall, were seriously affected by the drought.

"The mortality rate amongst live-

stock in the most affected parts of Afghanistan is estimated to be in the range of 50 per cent to 60 per cent," it said.

The report said the impoverished central region of Hazarajat might also be badly hit by the drought in coming months, which could trigger an influx of people from rural areas to Kabul.

It warned that shallow wells in the Taliban's Kandahar headquarters were drying up as the water table dropped and, if the drought continued, a water crisis could grip the city, 90 per cent of whose population relies on the wells.

However, the Taliban, which controls most of the country, criticised the UN for not taking 'practical measures.'

"There are enormous problems in terms of lack of water for drinking and irrigation in many parts of Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul and Uruzgan," Muttaen said.

"The local people are upset why the United Nations and other international aid groups have not done something practical," he said.

Muttaen said Taliban helicopters and tankers were supplying drinking water to affected villages.

Farmers in Kabul also said the drought had affected vegetable and wheat cultivation.

"There is no water even to pursue chase for our small gardens, Mohammad Ehsan, a farmer in Sarasiab village south of Kabul said.

Taliban officials on Tuesday said at least 25 people, most of them children, had died of dehydration and hunger in the drought-stricken regions.

The deaths over the past few weeks were reported in Shoraba and Hazarajat districts or Helmund where a Taliban-sponsored mass evacuation is underway, they said.

Some 4,000 families have been evacuated from the worst-affected areas in Helmund to other places in Afghanistan, Taliban officials said, adding that another 1,200 families moved across the border into the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, which is itself reeling under the effects of the drought.

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NATION

NATION 07 MAY 2000

Afghan protester arrested by Taliban

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — Wais Khan, an Afghan national was arrested by Taliban authorities in Laghman when he demanded return of his land confiscated when Taliban captured the region in 1996.

As per reports, Laghman Wais Khan and his other relatives migrated to Pakistan when the former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. They were compelled to leave Afghanistan when known intellectual Yameenuddin father of Wais Khan was hanged to death by the former communist regime of Noor Mo-

hammad Taraki.

Later after the fall of communist regime, the family got back property in Laghman. However, when Taliban captured Laghman, they occupied some 20 jareeb land of Syed family. Some seven days back, Wais Khan had left Peshawar for Laghman to ask Taliban for their land.

However, Taliban not only rejected the request but even he was put behind the bars.

Some of his relatives informed that Wais Khan never affiliated himself with any political group.

DAWN

15 MAY 2000

Taliban kill 12 robbers

PESHAWAR, May 14: The Taliban killed 12 highway robbers on Saturday in a nine-hour clash close to the Iranian border, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency reported on Sunday.

The AIP said the incident took place in Dehan Dara area of the western Farah province.

One member of the gang was arrested while the gang leader, Akhtar Mohammad, was among those killed. Akhtar Mohammad formerly commanded the fighters of Hizb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and had been living in Iran since 1996 when his forces were defeated by the Taliban in the Afghan power struggle.—DPA

Opium for sale in Afghanistan

SANGIN, Afghanistan (AFP) — Iranian and Pakistani drug smugglers can buy opium by the tonne in Sangin, a small desert community in southern Afghanistan that without doubt forms the world's biggest open market for the drug.

At the foot of a precipitous mountain slope and at the heart of the Taliban-controlled province of Helmand — producer of half of Afghanistan's 4,600 tonnes of opium last year — Sangin appears like any other desert town with its houses built into the ground and a burning wind leaving no corner untouched by a suffocating layer

of dust.

But here strangers, particularly Westerners, are not welcome and need an escort from the Taliban, the Islamic group which controls 80 per cent of the country that last year became the world's premier opium producer.

Almost all the 200 or so local Pashtun shops sell "liquid" or dry opium which, after its transformation into morphine or heroin, finds its way onto the illegal drugs market in Europe or the United States.

Sangin's operation draws in opium from the three southern

provinces of Afghanistan: Helmand, Kandahar and, to a lesser extent, Uruzgan, partly because all farmers are keen to deal with the Iranian and Pakistani bulk buyers.

The foreign buyers arrive in four-wheel drive pick-ups and, after haggling, buy between three or four tonnes in an atmosphere thick with the sour stench of the dark brown opium, sold as a paste in plastic sacks.

"The smugglers arrive at the village without weapons," said Haji Mira Jan, owner of several opium stores which he has operated for 16 years.

NATION 14 MAY 2000

Zahir Shah urges US to help resolve Afghan issue

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR - To end the Afghan crisis former king Mohammad Zahir Shah has established contacts with the United States of America to help to resolve the issue.

The former monarch who is staying in United States has been saying of his regime in 1973 he was established contact with the USA. He is guided by his confidential aide, Prince Minister Hamid Karzai, who is in New York for talks with the American policy makers.

The main purpose of the visit is to brief the Americans about former king Mohammad Zahir Shah's peace initiatives. Since July 1999 last, ex-king and his associates are working for negotiated solution to the conflict and to building up a consensus amongst the Afghans.

In a bid to muster support in favour of these objectives, the Organising Committee of Rome, Italy conference has constituted several teams. Such teams, comprising neutral, impartial and highly credible people would visit USA, Russia, Saudi Arab, Pakistan, Iran and other influential countries besides approaching leaders of the warring Afghan factions and influ-

ential Afghans throughout the world. Now the delegation being headed by Hamid Karzai is undertaking the USA visit in accordance with such objectives.

The reports from Rome, Italy the delegation included Khalid Shehza, Dr. Ishaq Nadri, Sultan Mahmood Ghazi, Zalmay Rasool and Mr. Rana Yousef Mansoori. All of them except Zalmay Rasool and Khalid Shehza have been assembled in United States from various countries and after holding a detailed discussion on their assignments, they have left for United States. The delegates have arrived and now awaiting for detail meeting with the American authorities including the USA Secretary of State for South Asian Region Mr. Karl Inderfurth and others.

"We are considering the trip to USA for resolving the conflict," remarked Hamid Karzai in a radio interview. He added that they are visiting this country to exchange views on their efforts aimed at a peaceful solution to the long awaited conflict and to muster their support. He was hopeful of their success in the light of United States insistence for early resolving of the conflict and return of peace and

stability in the war devastated Afghanistan.

In response to a question, Hamid Karzai said that they are planning to brief the Americans about reasons and objectives of Loya jirga which is considered a traditional parliament of Afghans. Similarly, they would inform the USA policy makers about constitutions, functions and influence of the Afghan Loya jirga.

"We considering the Loya jirga a realistic approach towards resolving of the conflict," he remarked and urged the global community to help in this regard.

Apart from such a delegation, former Afghan foreign minister Hidayat Amin Arsaia is leading another delegation for holding talks with the United Nations Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan and his special envoy to Afghanistan Mr. Francis Venderla. Hamid Karzai informed that similar delegations would visit other countries like Pakistan, Japan, Russian Federation, Saudi Arab, Iran and others for musing support of such countries as well as Afghans residing in that countries.

The United States is a super power, it has great resource, it wield influence in the United Nations as well as in the region. The Afghans cannot resolve their crisis from the present situation by themselves. That is why, they are compelled to ask them to help resolve the problem and help in reconstruction of the country.

"We will hold talks with Karl Inderfurth, Thomas Pickering, officials of the US National Security Council and other authorities, including the Congressmen. We have sent another delegation, headed by Hidayat Amin Arsaia to the United Nations. Delegation will be sent to Pakistan, Iran, Japan, Russia, European countries and all other countries, which in our view, can help in resolving the Afghan problem," Karzai said.

He added that they would also send a delegation to Afghanistan to hold talks with the Taliban and the opposition northern alliance on the idea of Loya jirga.

Karzai said that they are optimistic about musing support of various countries for the purpose. "We are hopeful. The United States has already offered help to us and we hope they will help the Afghans in resolving their problem. The time has now come that the Afghans should extend support the world," he said.

NATION

17 MAY 2000

Drought forces people to leave Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – Badghis province of Afghanistan has been badly affected by the drought. The price of water is much more than the other items of daily use. As a result the affected people are leaving the areas for Turkmenistan.

The UNO weekly update issued here on Wednesday reveals that districts of Jawan, Qades and village of Sangi Atesh were mostly affected.

A World Health Organisation mission reported that in the village Sangi Atesh 20 litres of water costs 120,000 Afghanis and a kilo of meat costs only 10,000 Afghanis. Many residents, mainly those with livestock, have migrated from the area to Qala—I-Naw, headquarter of the province or to the Turkmenistan border. On the borders between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, Oxus provide water to livestock and other use of human being except drinking, therefore, people are migrating to those areas.

It added that very few credible reports are available from Ghor province due to security problems, which have limited the access by the aid community. UNHCR in Kunduz arrivals that number of families in drought affected areas

in northern region is increasing. It added that more than 70 persons daily approach the UNHCR office for assistance.

Due to drought, the refugees repatriation from Balochistan is suspended. The report reveals that on May 9, 2000 last a coordination meeting on voluntary repatriation between UNHCR Afghanistan (Kandahar) and Pakistan (Quetta) took place at Quetta. The Pakistani authorities attended the meeting in order to discuss the effects of drought in Afghanistan and Southern Afghanistan.

While UNHCR suggested to repatriate because of severe drought in Afghanistan.

However, the report conformed repatriation of 1,217 from NWFP and Punjab. Such repatriated families have got the standard repatriation package at Jalalabad and Khost.

On the other hand during the week, no forcible return from Iran have been reported and the voluntary repatriation movement under the joint programme from Iran continued through the border at Islam Qala of Herat province. The 18th convoy with 1,596 returnees crossed the border, thus reaching number of total repatriated to 18,000.

Khuezai tribe re-unites with Afghanistan

Bureau Report

PESHAWAR, May 21: The elders of Khuezai tribe, occupying a 40km piece of land in Mohmand agency, have decided to re-unite their land with Afghanistan.

Five years ago the tribesmen had decided to make their land part of Pakistan after receiving assurances from the NWFP's governor, Maj-Gen Khurshid Ali Khan, that they would receive funds for basic amenities, including potable water, electricity, schools and roads. In exchange, the tribesmen had destroyed all their poppy crops, their only source of income.

They alleged that the past governments had either embezzled or re-allocated the funds meant for the Khuezai tribe.

The decision, they said, had been taken by a grand jirga as the promises had not been kept.

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25 MAY 2000

Journalist concerned over Russia's threat to Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - Known Afghan journalist Yaqoot Shinwari has expressed serious concern over the recent Russian threats to Afghanistan.

Commenting on the Russian threats to Afghanistan, Mr Shinwari through a Press release on Wednesday informed that a defeat of Russia is again struggling to get back its superior position. In fact, it could be considered an outcome of the internal rifts among the Afghan circles. He also diverted attention towards the Russian's brutalities against the Chechen Muslims and said that through these wars, Russia wants to control the region.

Yaqoot Shinwari said earlier on the issue of Arab militant Osama Bin Laden, the United States attacked Afghanistan. But Taliban did not take any action. So, this time again they may not be able to protect the country. He was of the view that Taliban are unable to safeguard the interests of Afghanistan. There is no security and no human rights that is why Afghanistan is isolated in the world today.

He expressed concern over recent threats by Taliban leaders to moderate Afghan leaders, technocrats, ulema and journalists. He urged the Pakistani authorities and United Nations to take early steps for protecting those who were put on hit list by Taliban.

Lecture on pre-war Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - The United States Public Affairs Program for Afghanistan and the Alliance Francaise has jointly arranged a Lecture and Slide Show on Pre-War Afghanistan and the Vale of Swat.

The show will be held at the Alliance Francaise, commonly known as French Cultural Center at University Town Peshawar on May 25 at 5.00 p.m.

The photographic collection is composed of 32 images taken by Luke Powell, an American photographer, during his travels to Afghanistan in the 1970s. Powell's pictures are classical and conservative, like 19th century paintings. His small figures in landscapes speak of man's relationship with nature and the environment.

While the slide show includes images of Swat, a beautiful hill station from Northern West part of the country.

5 Afghans killed by unknown assailants

From Our Correspondent

TARBELA GHAZI - Five persons of a Afghan family were killed including two real brothers their mother, wife and son of a brother.

According to the source, two Afghan brother were residing in Afghan refugee Camp No. 12 at Pannian Haripur along with their family and mother. On the mid-night falling between 15 and 16 May when all family members were sleeping some people attacked on them and opened indiscriminate firing. With the result of the firing Ghulam Nabi, his younger brother, wife, three years old son and mother were killed at the spot. After the incident assailant fled away from the scene.

NATION
18 MAY 2000

NATION
23 MAY 2000

NATION
25 MAY 2000

Afghanistan peace still a remote possibility

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR – Failure of recently concluded Jeddah talks has proved that noutsider can resolve the Afghan conflict or impose any formula on Afghans.

In the light of the failure, now global fora like UN and OIC need to realise the importance of intra-Afghan dialogues which can ensure an amicable solution to the long-awaited conflict.

The continuous unrest, confrontation and hostilities have not only destroyed Afghan society and sole Islamic identity of Afghanistan but they have also caused unrest in the regional countries in particular and rest of the world in general.

The regional and neighbouring countries have faced high influx of Afghan refugees, introduction of modern and sophisticated weapons and economic imbalance while rest of the world had got terrorism and narcotics trends in return of its heavy investment in the so-called cold war which was concluded with an heroic jihad, fought by the Afghans against former Soviet Union troops.

Since the invasion, the patrons and sponsors of the warring factions had always made attempts to form coalition regimes just for ensuring protection to their future interests in that country. And for such a purpose, first was the well publicised Geneva Accord on April 10, 1988. However, instead of easing the tension, the Geneva Accord intensified the fighting in Afghanistan as well as paved the way for a number of the regional and neighbouring countries to go for direct and unwarranted interferences in its affairs of that country.

In fact, the foreign forces and countries that are engaged in the

proxy war have ignored the rich Afghan traditions and despite knowing the realities, they always insisted on imposing their own decisions on the Afghans. Ignoring the fate of former British India and former Soviet Union at hands of Afghans, the remaining foreign countries are still following such unrealistic policies and expecting much more to be imposed on the Afghans. And for such purposes, these foreign countries always deceived the global forums particularly the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). Whenever, the efforts aimed at finding out a solution to the conflict through intra-Afghan dialogues were made such forces started direct or indirect talks. Now doubt to say that Saudi monarch who is desirous for an early solution to the Afghan conflict, was always misguided by those who had some nefarious designs in Afghanistan.

Ignoring the established realities i.e intra-Afghan dialogues like Loya Jirga, Shuras and others, these foreign forces in past had forced their puppets in Afghanistan for signing the Peshawar Accord on April 16, 1992. Whatever was the intentions behind such an accord, its outcome is before each and every one. Just for continuation of hostilities in Afghanistan, a complicated formula was imposed on the jihadic factions which led to conversion of the heroic Afghans into terrorists and drug-traffickers.

Later, their sponsors forced them for signing Jalalabad and Islamabad Accords. But all such steps proved futile exercise. And despite such facts, these forces are still insisting on new coalition between

the warring factions but now the situation has been changed as neither the warring factions can deceive the Afghans any more nor the Afghans allow to become tools of other's proxy wars.

No doubt to say that almost all the Jihadic leaders have been forgotten by Afghans while the former technocrats and tribal chieftains have been scattered in all over the world. It is true that such people had detached themselves from Afghanistan but their realistic thinkings now seems a big hurdle for those who always struggled to deceive the world. Not only neutral, democratic and patriotic Afghans but even the former Jihadic circles also believe that ideas regarding coalitions couldn't resolve the conflict. The conflict could only be resolved through intra-Afghan dialogues.

Recently, former king Mohammad Zahir Shah had initiated struggle for convening a meeting of the traditional Loya Jirga. No one had a concern with his past but each and every one believed that he (king) and his supporters were playing a neutral role.

The foreign countries and forces need to realise the previous mistakes and showed announce support in favour of ex-king efforts. A recent decision announced by the Foreign Office regarding its weight in favour of a Loya Jirga could be considered a good omen and could also be considered a realistic approach toward restoration of peace in the region.

It is time to resolve the Afghan conflict otherwise, war flames could spill over to other regional countries that may put world peace in jeopardy.

NATION

13 MAY 2000

NATION

27 MAY 2000

South parts of Afghanistan also affected

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Western Afghanistan like its Southern part is also suffering from drought.

According to a UN report districts of Jawan, Qades and villages of Sangi Atesh are most affected.

A WHO mission reported that in the village of Sangi Atesh 20 liters of water cost 120,000 Afghanis and a kilo of meat costs 10,000 Afghanis.

Residents depending on live stock trade have are said to have migrated from the area to Qalati-Naw and to the Turkmen border.

UNHCR in Kunduz reports the

arrival of an increasing number of families in Kunduz from the drought affected areas in the north mainly from Maimana.

According to UNHCR 70 people are daily approaching the UNHCR office for help. The UNHCR is providing tents tarpaulins to the needy families.

Meanwhile UNFPA has opened a small office within the UNDP premises in Kabul.

UNFPA assistance aims to improve the reproductive health status of the Afghan women.

By the end of 2000 UNFPA will have upgraded eight of the Afghan Red Crescent Society clinics.

Threats of Russian attacks condemned

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - The National Islamic Front of Afghanistan (NIFA) has strongly condemned Russian threats of air strikes against Afghanistan and termed them to be in sharp conflict with universally accepted norms and especially the UN charter which is a multi-lateral binding treaty.

In a statement issued here said that the NIFA believed that no country however large or powerful did has the right to take international law into its hand and launch attack on another sovereign country. The NIFA added that in case Russian federation had any complaint about Afghanistan, it could be took up and discussed at the UN, of which Russian Federation was also, a permanent member.

Osama changes guards

PESHAWAR, May 28: Osama bin Laden, fearing infiltration by US intelligence, has replaced his Arab bodyguards in Afghanistan with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, according to Pakistani officials here.

They said Bin Laden had recruited over 30 Pakistanis and Bangladeshis belonging to Kashmir's Harkatul Mujahideen.

Osama made the changes after the arrest in Afghanistan last month of a Syrian and an Iraqi who said they were working for US and Israeli intelligence.

The Taliban said that 22-year-old Syrian Abdul Rahim and an Iraqi, known only as Arkan, had confessed that they were recruited in the United Arab Emirates.

"Our mission was to collect information about Arabs in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden's whereabouts and his ties with the Taliban," Rahim told journalists who met him in jail where he and his Iraqi colleague await trial.

Pakistani officials said the arrests prompted Osama bin Laden to dismiss a bodyguard formed of Arabs and replace them with men from a training camp he helped set up at Rishkor, south of Kabul.

MORE IDEOLOGICALLY COMMITTED: "The Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are more committed ideologically and it would be a year at least before they too are infiltrated or approached by the various intelligence agencies seeking information," said one Pakistani official.

They said Bin Laden had been rendered ineffective by a communication ban placed on him by the Taliban to deflect US criticism, but there were no restrictions on his movements. —Reuters

NATION

27 MAY 2000

DAWN

29 MAY 2000

NATION

15 MAY 2000

Taliban vow to wipe out poppy cultivation

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia need international help to eradicate poppy cultivation, the leader of the Islamic regime's fight against drugs has said.

Mulla Abdul Amid Akhundzada also confirmed that Afghanistan, which became the world's leading producer of opium in 1999, had agreed with Pakistan and Iran a joint operation to wipe out the refining laboratories in the border area in the far south of the country.

Despite the fact that opium growing in the south has reached its peak, the chief of the High Commission for the Drug Control of the Islamic Emirate told AFP that the Taliban need international assistance.

'We are cracking down heavily on poppy farms and we will continue to do so,' stressed Akhundzada at Kandahar, despite a United Nations estimate that placed the Afghan opium harvest at a record 4,600 tonnes last year.

The mulla, a close aide to Taliban leader Mulla Mohammad Omar, disputed the figure as based on

false 'projections' by the UN office for drug control and crime prevention (UNDCP).

But he admitted that total opium output last year had been 'important' due to favourable weather.

He also said the time it took to eradicate drug farms would depend on the level of international funding, without specifying a precise figure. He added that his previous demand for 1.6 billion dollars had been 'an estimate.'

Some countries, particularly those like the United States which imposed sanctions on the Taliban for their perceived harbouring of Islamic terrorists, are reluctant to hand over aid, pointing to the Taliban's 10 per cent tax on the harvest. But the mulla said: 'The more the international effort, the quicker the crackdown.'

The UNDCP has already begun trying a programme to encourage other crops, such as wheat, grapes or cummin.

Akhundzada stressed that the war on drugs had been initiated by Omar himself, who decreed a 30 per cent cut in production in Sep-

tember last year.

In reality, production this year will be down on last year, according to experts, but above all because of the drought which has hit the south of the country.

The Taliban controls around 90 per cent of the area in which opium is produced in the south and east of the country.

Akhundzada admitted that the southern desert in the province of Helmand — which alone accounts for 45 per cent of Afghan opium production — contains several laboratories which transform opium into morphine.

'It's a fact that that exists,' he said. 'We want to dismantle these laboratories but for that we need the cooperation of Iran and Pakistan.'

'It's a desert area and very difficult to control,' said the mulla, despite international experts' assertion that the Islamic militia is present and active in the region.

Whether refined or raw, opium leaves Afghanistan for Iran and Pakistan en route, often via Turkey, to the Western market.

Taliban deny arrest of Zahir supporters

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Afghanistan's Taliban have refuted reports about the arrest of political opponents particularly the supporters of former Afghan monarch Zahir Shah.

Governor Khost, Mohammad Shafeeq Mohammadi and the Paktia Governor, Moulvi Abdul Haris Khaddam have, in their joint statement, rejected these reports terming it just rumours.

They said no arrest has been

made in these provinces, reports Radio Tehran.

Reports last week said Taliban's intelligence officials had arrested a number of supporters of former king, Zahir Shah in Khost and Paktia.

The statement of the Afghan Governors has come at a time when the Pakistan government has announced support to Loya Jirga, the radio said.

A high ranking official of Pakistan Foreign Ministry told the of-

ficial news agency that Pakistan would support the Loya Jirga if it could resolve the Afghan conflict.

Taliban's envoy to New York, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, while talking to media persons in Islamabad, has also agreed in principle to the idea of holding Loya Jirga.

However, he said Loya Jirga was not only the domain of former King, Zahir Shah rather Taliban would also convene Loya Jirga, whenever needed.

NATION

15 MAY 2000

NATION

08 MAY 2000

Detained Arabs were spying for US, Israel: Taliban

KABUL (AFP) - Two Arabs arrested here for alleged espionage have admitted they were spying for the United States and Israel, Afghanistan's Taliban militia said Sunday.

Taliban Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal told AFP the detainees were collecting information on the ruling Taliban, Osama bin Laden and other 'foreigners' living here.

'They have admitted that they had been assigned by the United States and Israel to go to Afghanistan to have a close observation of the situation and to report back to them,' Jamal said.

The Taliban militia controls most of the country and harbours Osama despite international pres-

sure to hand him over to US justice authorities.

Osama has lived in Afghanistan since 1996 and is wanted by Washington for allegedly masterminding the bombings of two US embassies in Africa in 1998.

More than 200 of the two Arabs detained last month in Kabul and then moved to the southern provinces of Kandahar, were

hailing from Iraq. Both the sides have made this understanding during a meeting held between Afghan Minister Maulvi Ameer Khan Mutaqqi and NIFA leader Syed Hamid Gillani.

A Press release issued here Friday reveals that the meeting took place at the residence of Afghan ambassador to Pakistan Syed Mohammad Haqqani at Islamabad.

In the recent past, the Islamabad meeting became serious because between Taliban and NIFA leaders, Earlier, leaders of both the parties have held a detail meeting at Jalal-

and Syria, Jamal said. Their main aim was to spy on the Islamic Emirate (Taliban). Of course they had plans to gather information on Osama and other

Taliban, NIFA agree to resume peace talks

From Our Correspondent

labad. At Islamabad meeting, the two sides have held detail talks with each other.

The Taliban leader informed his counterpart from NIFA of convey- ing their proposal to suggestions to high ranking Taliban leaders.

On this occasion, Maulvi Amir Khan Mutaqqi has negotiated the NIFA for its fresh role and a re-align towards resolving the conflict in the light of such values, Taliban leaders have a great respect for its lead-

In third phase, high ranking lead-

ers of both the parties likely to held a meeting for initiating a joint struggle for resolving of the Af-

ghan conflict.

foreigners here,' the minister said. Jamal added that the investigation of Syrian national Abdul Rahman was complete, while the Iranian being questioned by Taliban intelligence officials.

The minister said that so far the Taliban had not been in contact with the alleged spies' families nor their countries of origin.

The Pakistan rolled in Kabul's Abu Hanifa em- counterparty from NIFA of convey-

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ghan conflict.

Afghanistan for Koranic studies, he added.

Jamal said Abdul Rahman was presented to a select group of foreign journalists in Kandahar a few days ago.

He quoted Rahman as telling the reporters that he was hired by Israeli intelligence. A US embassy in the United Arab Emirates, where he was studying in the Sharia faculty of Al-Qadima University.

He reportedly said he was blackmailed and forced to go to Afghanistan as a spy after he was raped and filmed as he was sodomised by these agents.

Taliban deny Osama kidney failure report

CAIRO, May 4: Taliban officials have denied press reports that said that Osama bin Laden is suffering from kidney failure.

In a statement, the Islamic Observation Centre (IOC) said bin Laden was enjoying good health.

The statement quoted the officials as saying that bin Laden, upon hearing the rumours, said the Western media and some of its Arab allies had spread such rumours in order to dishearten the bin Laden's followers.

Bin Laden "continues to practice his favourite hobby, horseback riding, and to train Afghans and Arabs living (in Afghanistan) in this sport," the IOC statement said. —Reuters

DAWN

05 MAY 2000

Taliban vow to wipe out poppy crop

KANDAHAR, May 15: The Taliban need international help to eradicate poppy cultivation, said Mulla Abdul Amid Akhundzada, the leader of the Islamic regime's Commission for Drug Control.

He also confirmed that Afghanistan, which became world's leading producer of opium in 1999, had agreed with Pakistan and Iran for a joint operation to wipe out refining laboratories in the border area in the far south of the country.

"We are cracking down heavily on poppy farms" he said disputing the figure based on false "projections" by the UN office for drug control and crime prevention (UNODC). —AFP

DAWN

16 MAY 2000

NATION

06 MAY 2000

Taliban to meet rivals again next month

DAWN
10 MAY 2000
Taliban,
Opposition agree
to ceasefire

JEDDAH, May 10: Afghanistan's warring factions have agreed to meet again next month after talks in Saudi Arabia that ended with an accord to exchange prisoners, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) said on Wednesday.

Ibrahim Bakr, OIC deputy secretary general for political affairs, said the Taliban and an Afghan opposition coalition would resume talks next month either at OIC headquarters in Jeddah or in Afghanistan itself.

As part of confidence-building measures, the Afghan factions decided on Tuesday to swap prisoners, after two days of indirect talks with an OIC mediation team led by Bakr and with the UN envoy on Afghanistan, Francesc Vendrell.

"The two parties agreed to exchange all the prisoners and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid for civilians," said Bakr.

Bakr, who said the Taliban had proposed that the next series of talks take place in Kabul, added that the two delegations had also agreed "to spare civilians during military operations".

Asked whether agreement had been reached on a ceasefire, Bakr said the OIC had "always worked for such an accord ..."

"The two parties are currently not carrying out widespread operations against each other and we have urged them to continue on this path."

"I understood from both parties a sincere desire to achieve a comprehensive agreement," he said. "But repeated foreign interference in the Afghan crisis prevents the signing of such an accord."—AFP

JEDDAH (AFP) - A coalition of Afghan opposition groups and the ruling Taliban agreed Tuesday to a ceasefire and an exchange of prisoners, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) sponsoring the peace talks here said.

The coalition and the Taliban delegation decided during their second round of negotiations in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah to 'carry out an immediate exchange of prisoners,' said an OIC official speaking under the condition of anonymity.

'The exchange of prisoners will start Wednesday and will be supervised by the Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross, and come under the umbrella of the OIC and the United Nations,' the official said.

The two parties also decided to 'observe a ceasefire and to work for the opening of roads between all regions in Afghanistan for citizens and humanitarian activities,' the source said.

'These agreements are a step to consolidating the confidence between the two parties on the way to a comprehensive settlement to the Afghan crisis,' the source said, adding they would be signed Wednesday.

The Taliban delegation to the talks was led by Mulla Amir Khan Mutaqi, while the opposition coalition is headed by an official from the government of ousted Prime Minister Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Rabbani's forces, which are under ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood, continue to defy the Islamic militia north of Kabul and in the mountainous northeast. The Taliban is recognised only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

DAWN

11 MAY 2000

Taliban to pursue all options for peace: Kabir

NATION From Col (R) Ikramullah 6 MAY 2000

KABUL - Taliban are always ready to pursue all practical and reasonable options for restoration of peace in Afghanistan. "From our side there is no delay and our doors are always open, both on the domestic as well as external spheres but the final outcome rests with Allah Almighty."

This view was expressed by the Acting President of Afghanistan, Maulvi Muhammad Kabir, in an exclusive interview.

The interview took place at the President's Official Residence. It started at 1130 hours and ended at 1300 hours. This was the writers second meeting with the Acting President, the first one being in early 1998. At that time also, the President Mullah Rabbani was unwell and Maulvi Muhammad Kabir, Governor Jalalabad was holding the acting charge. The fighting at that time against the Northern Alliance was spread over many fronts. Now 95 per cent of Afghanistan is under the firm control of the Taliban and most of the Northern Alliance leaders have fled the country, thus reducing the active opposition to only Ahmad Shah Masood who continues his hold over the Punjsher Valley and

its limited surrounding areas. Masood has just suffered a military setback couple of days back when the Taliban have captured the Northern portion of the famous and strategic Salang Tunnel from the northern side of Kunduz. However, Masood is still clinging to the southern side of the tunnel, while the tunnel itself has been choked during blasting in earlier battles. To end the present conflict, a meeting was recently held at Jeddah through the auspicious of the OIC which has, so far, remained fruitless.

The interview was aimed at finding out the Taliban reaction and response to the recent parleys held between the Interior Ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan with regard to the Afghan Transit Trade, which has been an irritant for quite some time and other matters of mutual interest between the two countries including training camps of so-called terrorists on Afghan soil, the issue of Osama bin Laden and protection to Pakistani criminal fugitives.

Following are the excerpts:

Q: The overall military as well as political situation at the domes-

tic level has considerably changed since our last meeting in early 1998. Are you hopeful that peace will soon return to this war torn country so that the essential task of reconstruction and development could begin without any further delay?

A: We are always hopeful. The final results are in the hands of Allah Zui Jalal as you know the Northern Alliance has practically collapsed and the only remaining resistance to Taliban within Afghanistan is now confined to Ahmad Shah Masood. *Insha'Allah* this will also be resolved soon. We are always ready to pursue all practical and reasonable options for restoration of peace. That is why we went to Jeddah recently in quest for peace. From our side there is no delay and our doors are always open, both on the domestic as well as external spheres. The final outcome rests with God Almighty.

Q: Your Interior Minister recently visited Pakistan and held in-depth talks with this counterpart and other senior officials of Pakistani government. What are your impressions regarding the outcome of these negotiations? Are you satisfied and pleased with the final outcome?

A: Regardless of the results, such contacts are always useful. The main thing is the implementation of the commitments made. Regarding the recent talks between the two Interior Minister, if both sides strict to the undertakings reached, the visit would be termed as successful. A bulk of our Transit Trade goods has been withheld in Pakistan since many years. Commitments are made at the highest level ever by the previous regime in Pakistan to release them. We think that it is important that these should now be released without unnecessary delay. We feel it is Afghanistan's legal right according to the terms of the transit trade agreement and the restrictions imposed in the past were unjust.

Q: It appears that Mullah Razzak has not been able to conclude the issue finally. Are there some hitches regarding the transit trade issue still unresolved? I hope this is not causing any irritation or resentment? The transit trade issue is not new. This is a very old agreement and from time to time new issues are raised which are not included in the original agreement. As a result lot of transit trade goods have been blocked in Pakistan not released for one reason or the other. This question has been discussed thread bare many times during the past few years. Every time we are

told that the blocked goods would be released without delay. But this does not happen. Therefore, when the Pakistan Interior Minister asked Mullah Razzak to cut out certain items in the list of the transit trade, we have readily agreed to reduce the list by about 25-30 items as banned items, in view of our brotherly relations and Pakistan's difficulties. However, our gesture does not seem to have been very much appreciated because, unfortunately, the demand of the Pakistani side during the negotiation, kept on increasing and their proposed list kept expanding despite the affect that, as a matter of our legal right, we were initially not ready to be even a single item. We are waiting that this soon resolved amicably and the commitments made to us at the highest level with regard to release of our old blocked goods is honoured at the earliest.

Q: Another point on the agenda of the Interior Ministers pertain to training camps in Afghanistan and particularly refuge having been granting to some Pakistani criminal and terrorists on your side. Initially your interior Minister declared the existence of any such camps or any terrorists from Pakistan granted any protection in Afghanistan. Subsequently our Interior Ministry provided certain lists of such camps and persons like Riaz Basra etc., with photographs and alleged locations. Any comments about your future course of action on Pakistan's request?

A: We have told Pakistan that no terrorist training camp or facility for any Pakistani national existed in Afghanistan. The list provided by Pakistan shall be thoroughly examined and we shall *Insha'Allah* side by our commitment to Pakistan (this was stated with such emphasis and sincerity which leaves no doubt that Pakistan's request shall be implemented). There is a clear difference between a terrorist and a Mujahid. Anyone who has been a mujahid and comes to Afghanistan is our guest. He may be Osama Bin Laden or someone else. However, we never heard anything of Riaz Basra during jihad times but only recently. The second thing is that he (Riaz Basra) being an enemy of Pakistan, which is an Islamic country, could not be granted such an honour. More importantly Osama bin Laden has been the guest of our nation and Ummah but it is not the case with Riaz Basra. The latter has no history in Afghanistan and his only identity is that of an offender and terrorist which does not qualify him to be the guest of the Afghan nation. On the contrary we keep saying to ourselves that if we came to get hold of Riaz Basra we may ask Pakistan to exchange him with Mr Shah Nawaz Tanai. There are training camps in respect of only those Pakistanis who are here since the time of Afghan jihad. These in-

clude people like Maulana Jabbar, Qari Sadullah Akhtar and Maulana Masood Azhar etc. No new Pakistani have come to such camps during Taliban's rule and if those cultists have hidden from you they must have hidden from us as well, since we are friends.

Q: The international community is trying to isolate you on various grounds such as human rights and privileges in respect of women. The UN has also applied economic sanctions. Are you considering any flexibility and reorientation to accommodate world opinion?

A: I think we do not have any basic issue or problem vis-a-vis the international community. We have satisfied almost all the longstanding demands of the UN and other countries. However, having done so we think that the international community must realise that:

- * There is a clear difference between a terrorist and a mujahid;
- * We have done whatever we could to address the menace of narcotics, and that

- * We have given our women their due rights within the bounds of our religion and traditional values.

We don't have any problems with the outside world, however we do believe that these people have a serious lack of information and understanding about today's Afghanistan. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that they do not try to comprehend the realities on ground through independent means but instead blindly follow the perceptions of the west and non-Muslims about us. Of course Afghanistan is not a colony of the US so that their culture could be practiced here (as they expect from us).

Q: How do you see Ahmad Shah Masood's present resistance to your government? This is hindering restoration of permanent peace and starting the most urgent task of reconstruction and development. Do you have any time frame in mind?

A: We have a firm belief that victory (Nuzur) or defeat is in the hands of Allah. We have defeated Masood on several fronts; his major defeat was in the Salang Tunnel in 1996, which has completely broken his back. He has also suffered defeats against us in the North. We, however, are not proud on these achievements as 'our achievements' but we have always feared Allah. In practical terms, the outside world is giving him substantial military and financial help because they know that he is their last bastion in Afghanistan against the Taliban. If they lose him, like others including Dostum etc with whom they could ever force the Taliban to share the so-called broad-based government. Another thing is that the Kuffar cannot see Muslims prosper or develop. The strategic location of the Panjsher valley naturally guarded by high mountains has also come to Masood's rescue. But we are sure that these problems would ultimately be overcome whenever Allah desired.

Taliban reject US terrorism charge

ISLAMABAD, May 1: The Taliban rejected on Monday the US State Department report that accused Afghanistan of being 'a major hub of international terrorism', and offered again to resolve the Osama bin Laden issue.

"Afghanistan has never been a centre of terrorism. Islam and the Afghans from their very nature dislike terrorism," the independent Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) quoted the foreign ministry as saying in Kabul.

The *New York Times* said on Sunday that the annual US State Department report on terrorism had named Afghanistan as posing a "major terrorist threat", partly because it sheltered Osama bin Laden.

The Taliban, who say Osama bin Laden was part of a US-backed plan to end the Soviet occupation by funding freedom fighters, have repeatedly offered to resolve the Osama bin Laden issue but Washington

says only his expulsion will suffice.

A Taliban spokesman told the Pakistan-based news agency that his government was ready to resolve the issue of Osama bin Laden, adding it would not hand him over to any country because there was no criminal evidence against bin Laden.

"We want a solution to the problem but we will not hand him over to anyone because Osama is only facing accusations and there is no evidence against him," the spokesman said.

The spokesman said the Taliban had made several proposals to the United States but the US government had rejected them.

The *New York Times* quoted a State Department official as saying Afghanistan was not added to the list of terrorist countries because Washington did not recognize its government led by the Taliban.—Reuters

'US settling political scores in Afghanistan'

ISLAMABAD (NNI)—The ruling Taliban in Afghanistan have again said that the US allegations against Afghanistan that it was providing haven to the terrorists is nothing but an attempt to settle political scores.

A senior spokesman for the Taliban in Kandahar, Mulla Abdul Hai Mutmaen while reacting to the US State Department report on terrorism said "The US report is just a propaganda campaign aims at maligning the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. In fact, they have been talking about of just few limited issues which having nothing to do with terrorism. They are just making them an excuse. I must say that not only the government of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan but the Afghans as well are not terrorists at all", he maintained.

Mutmaen said that whatever the Afghans have done is open secret be it war or peace.

The Afghans have nothing to do with terrorism. In fact, the Americans have some limited political problems with the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and that is why, they are trying to add to the number of enemies of Afghans through malicious media trial of the Taliban. "I think, the world people would sooner or later realise the authenticity and validity of such propaganda.

They would understand that such allegations are just part of the US administration's policy as there are not as many problems in Afghanistan as are being claimed by them. We have never supported the terrorism rather we have condemned it", he said.

Taliban renew talks offer to US

ISLAMABAD (NNI)—The ruling Taliban in Afghanistan have renewed talks offer to the United States on all the controversial issues.

"We have never closed doors for talks, we are ready to discuss all the controversial issues with the United States. We want good relations with Washington as we have all along been preferring negotiations", Afghan envoy in New York, Abdul Hakim Mujahid told a press conference in Islamabad on Friday.

He said that Taliban believe in negotiations with all the big powers, foreign countries including the United States and neighbouring countries of Afghanistan. The envoy termed the US support to the Afghans during the jihad very important.

On terrorism, drugs and human rights situation in Afghanistan, Mujahid said that these are strategic issues and should be viewed in the background of cultural contexts and traditions in Afghanistan. He expressed readiness of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to

resolve all the outstanding problems through negotiations and mutual understanding. However, ground realities in Afghanistan must be kept in view, he added.

On the forthcoming OIC sponsored Afghan peace talks between the Taliban and opposition Northern Alliance scheduled for May 7 in Jeddah, Mujahid hoped that the opponents would prefer national interests on personal interests so that the talks could be result oriented.

The Taliban envoy regretted that whenever peace talks are held, the opposition northern alliance resorts to fighting to destroy atmosphere for reaching peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict.

"We would not initiate war this summer and there would be no fighting in Afghanistan provided foreign support to the opposition is stopped. We are opposed to war as it does not bring prosperity rather adds to the miseries and agonies of the miserable Afghans". Talks are the only way to settle conflicts, he added.

NATION

03 MAY 2000

NATION

06 MAY 2000

DAWN 02 MAY 2000

Sanctions no solution to Osama issue: Taliban

World recognition to make Taliban more responsible

11 MAY 2000

NATION

ISLAMABAD (NNI)—Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Wednesday said that imposition of economic sanctions on the people of Afghanistan and other pressure tactics could not settle the issue of Osama bin Laden.

"Negative pressure will give negative results. If more pressure is being put on us, it will not yield positive results," Taliban envoy in New York Abdul Hakim Mujahid told reporters at Afghan embassy in Islamabad.

"International recognition of Afghan Islamic Emirate will pave the way for solution of many problems including the controversy about Osama bin Laden," Mujahid said. He said the Afghan Islamic Emirate would be more responsible under the UN charter if it is recognised.

"If Afghanistan would be the member of the United Nations, it would be easy for it to solve all problems including the controversy over Osama".

He said accused are living in other countries including the United States, Britain and other Western countries. "But no sanctions have been imposed on them for extradition of any accused". He said the UN is dealing with countries and governments but in "our case the UN slapped sanctions on the people of Afghani-

stan". "You can not force oppressed nations (to accept such things). Osama is a guest and living as a refugee, who fought against the erstwhile Soviet Union. He is living in Afghanistan on humanitarian ground. He is not operating against any country".

Asked as to why the US is not understanding Taliban's notion, Mujahid said, "The United States is not understanding the psychology of Islam and Afghan people. They are seeking advice from those individuals, who have ulterior motives and personal benefits. The US is adopting policy of might is right".

Asked if recognition is a pre-requisite by Taliban for solution to Osama issue, he said, "It is not a pre-requisite. "We will put a good solution under the obligation of Islamic teachings and UN charter." If concrete evidence is found that Osama is involved against any country, he will be brought in Islamic court in Afghanistan.

"We have floated proposals that ulema from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and a third country should decide the issue. "We have also put forth proposal that the OIC should monitor his activities".

Asked that the United States has rejected these proposals, Mujahid said rejection of proposals is not way of solution. "Negative pres-

sure will give negative results". He said cooperation between the Afghan Islamic Emirate and the United States may lead to solution of problems.

Asked whether solution of Osama's problem will improve ties between Taliban and the US, he said, "Osama is only an excuse for pressure. If one issue is resolved, the Americans will raise other problem".

Mujahid said that State Department spokesman James Rubin has said that this is not one issue of Osama but they have other issues with Taliban including human rights, narcotics and several others. "There is lack of confidence between the United States and Taliban. Confidence should be created before you demand for expulsion of a man".

Asked about UN Security Council's recent warning to slap more sanctions on Taliban, he said, "We think that Russian Federation is involved in a move for more sanctions. They (Russians) are taking revenge to prolong war in Afghanistan. It is not legitimate" He said the Russian move receives cool response from other Security Council members.

About world criticism to Taliban human rights record, he said, "It depends on the culture of a society. Some countries want to impose

their culture. Taliban basic goal is to respect human rights. Our Opposition warlords are trampling human rights but they are being supported for more fighting. This is irony and amusing".

To a question about Taliban's relations with neighbours, he said, "We want friendly relations with neighbours. But neighbours and regional friends should realise realities. Some of the neighbours want continuation of war.

Asked if he sees change in Pakistan's Afghan policy after its support to the traditional Loya Jirga (grand assembly), he said, "I do not think any change. Pakistan dared recognise realities in Afghanistan.

About Loya Jirga, he said, "Loya Jirga is not personal property of King Zahir Shah. "We are not against Loya Jirga. It needs a proper time. If we convene Loya Jirga, then the countries, which are talking about the jirga, will oppose our move". He said Taliban will hold loya jirga at appropriate time.

Mujahid said Taliban had held jirgas in the past. In 1995, some 15,000 religious scholars gathered in Kandahar and elected Mulla Omar as their leaders. Second time, Taliban invited 2,800 tribal leaders in 1998, when Iran deployed 200,000 soldiers along border with Afghanistan.

Afghan Interior Minister due today

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD—Afghan Interior Minister Maulvi Abdul Razaq will arrive here today (Sunday) for talks with his Pakistani counterpart Lt Gen. (Retd) Moinuddin Haider on issues related to terrorism and smuggling.

The Afghan Interior Minister was earlier scheduled to arrive here on Monday (tomorrow). He will lead a delegation during his talks with government of Pakistan on issues affecting both the countries.

12 MAY 2000

NATION

- 2 MAY 2000

Kabul minister arrives for talks

No Pakistani criminal in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD, May 14: Afghan Interior Minister Maulvi Abdul Razaq Akhund on Sunday said that they had no reports of hiding Pakistani criminals in Afghanistan.

Maulvi Akhund, heading an eight-member delegation, arrived on a five-day official visit for talks on host of issues, including terrorism, smuggling, Afghan transit trade and repatriation of refugees.

On his arrival at Islamabad airport, he told reporters that they would discuss a number of issues with their Pakistani counterpart.

When asked to comment on the prevailing situation in Afghanistan, Maulvi Razaq said: "Peace has returned to Afghanistan and the return of refugees has already started."

"Now they can return and resettle in their homeland without any problem," he added.

He said the Taliban government was taking a number of steps to help resettle their countrymen.

The minister hoped that his visit would help strengthen the existing ties between the two countries and usher in a new era of cooperation in different sectors.

Maulvi Razaq, who flew-in a special UN flight, was received at the airport by Interior Secretary Hassan Raza Pasha and senior interior ministry officials.

Pakistan Ambassador to Afghanistan Aziz Ahmed Khan also arrived here in the same flight.

Official sources said there would be two rounds of talks between Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider and his Afghan counterpart on May 16 and 17.

They added, Islamabad was going to raise the issues of refugees' repatriation and the transit trade, which had been causing adverse effects on its economy.

The two countries have differences over the ATTA which led to imposition of restrictions in early '90s on it by the first Nawaz Sharif government after misuse of the facility.

Pakistan had been providing transit facilities to the landlocked Afghanistan under an agreement signed in 1965.

There are some 1.6 million Afghan refugees still residing in Pakistan.

A UN-sponsored phased repatriation of Afghan refugees started in March this year. Some 100,000 refugees would be repatriated by the UN programme every year.

The Afghan delegation is comprising deputy foreign minister Mulla Abdul Jalil, deputy finance minister Arifullah Arif, deputy frontiers minister Haji Mohammad Ibrahim, deputy commerce minister Mulla Mohammad Faizan, deputy minister for repatriation and martyrs Mullah Rehmat Wahidyar, special secretary to interior minister Mohammad Alam Waziri and representative of the Afghan foreign ministry, Maulvi Sardar Mohammad Sherzad. —APP/NNI

Cross-border movement
to be regulated

Taliban to cut transit trade list

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 16: Afghanistan on Tuesday agreed in principle to Pakistan's proposal to regulate the movement of people across the borders to check smuggling, drug trade, gun running, car-jacking and escape of fugitives.

The agreement came during a meeting held here between Pakistan Interior Minister Lt Gen Moinuddin Haider and Afghanistan Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund. The two ministers were assisted by the officials of their respective ministries.

Secretary interior Mr Hasan Raza Pasha told Dawn that Pakistan told the Taliban leader that the free movement across the borders needed to be regulated. He said Pakistan also proposed the introduction of *Rahdari* system like the one currently in operation between certain points in Balochistan on Pakistan-Iran borders.

The Afghan minister, who arrived here on Sunday on a five-day visit, Mr Pasha said, agreed upon the need to regulate the invalid movement across the borders but sought time to discuss the issue to come

up with Afghanistan's own proposal to meet Islamabad's concerns.

On the request of Islamabad, Kabul also agreed to remove 30 items from the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) list but, at the same time, declined to include over a dozen items in the negative list.

The items which the Afghan minister agreed to remove from ATTA include all types of vehicles, cigarette, paper and filter rods, VCR/VCP, chewing gum, toilet accessories, video cassette, cosmetics, face powder, juicers, blenders/mixers, food processors, baby pampers, tiles, televisions, air conditioners, dinner sets, kitchen items, etc.

The items, which the Taliban are refusing to remove from the ATTA list include telephone sets, bicycles and spare parts, tape recorders, bulbs and tube lights, sewing machines, tools, footwear, gas heaters, sugar, black tea and razor blades.

SMUGGLING: A press release issued later said the government of Afghanistan had agreed to cooperate in elimination of smuggling on Pakistan-Afghan borders. It said the Afghan delegation also agreed to tighten security on the borders to check illegal movement of people.

DAWN

15 MAY 2000

DAWN

17 MAY 2000

Cross-border drugs movement

Afghanistan agrees to exchange information

By Rana Qaiser

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan and Afghanistan on Wednesday agreed to exchange information on cross-border movement of narcotics and also reached an understanding that some 100,000 Afghan refugees would repatriate to their country this year.

These decisions were officially announced after the Interior Ministers of both the countries completed two rounds of talks here. A host of issues including Afghan Transit Trade were discussed.

The Afghan delegation, led by Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund, agreed to exchange information of cross-border movement of narcotics to target stockpiles of opium and heroin laboratories.

An agreement was also reached

to set up a special group comprising anti-narcotics officials of both the countries to take specific steps for eradicating this menace. Both the sides agreed to nominate a technical team of experts and surveyors to demarcate border at Qamar-ud-Din Karez.

They also agreed on the formation of a permanent Joint Commission to discuss and resolve any issues concerning cross-border movement and issuance of visas etc.

The Afghan delegation also agreed to speed up efforts for the return of Afghan refugees during coming years, saying the government of Afghanistan wanted its people to get back to the homeland and play their due role in the

country's reconstruction.

The return of the Afghan refugees will be under a tri-partite agreement between United Nations and the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

According to the agreement the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) will provide shelter and drinking water to the refugees on their return to Afghanistan. Transport will also be provided to them to reach their destinations.

Interior Minister Lt. Gen. (Retd) Moinudin Haider said Pakistan expected from the international community to help Afghanistan rebuild its infrastructure which was destroyed during their fight against former Soviet Union.

The talks were participated by the Ambassadors of both the countries and senior officials of federal and provincial governments of Balochistan and NWFP.

Two sessions of talks were held on Wednesday. The Afghan delegation, which was here on a five day visit, has extended its stay for another day to finalise outstanding issues related to Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA).

NATION

18 MAY 2000

'Afghan transit trade accord on the anvil'

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - The spokesman of the visiting Afghan delegation and Taliban Ambassador in Islamabad, Maulvi Said Mohammad Haqqani has expressed the hope that the two countries would reach an agreement on Afghan Transit Trade.

"We told Pakistani officials that a number of Afghan delegations have visited Pakistan and held talks on the issue but regrettably such meetings did not yield result. This time, we want to find an ultimate solution to the problem. The ongoing talks would not conclude without any result like the previous meetings. The two sides have agreed to find a solution to the problem," Haqqani told VOA in an interview.

He said that threadbare discussions were held on the issue. The issue of smuggling was also discussed. "So far as the issue of smuggling is concerned, it is up to Pakistan as it has nothing to do with Afghanistan. We told them that although this is a principled

right of Afghanistan that the route should remain open yet the Islamic Emirate assured them full co-operation in checking smuggling," he said.

The Afghan envoy said that the route remains closed for the past sometime but even then the Pakistani markets are flooded with foreign goods. These goods are not being brought to Pakistan only from Afghanistan rather such goods are smuggled into Pakistan from other sides as well which should also be kept in mind, he maintained.

Haqqani said that Pakistan did raise the issue of terrorism and said that the people who commit crimes in Pakistan take shelter in Afghanistan and those who commit crimes in Afghanistan cross into Pakistan.

The issue of the repatriation of the Afghan refugees was also discussed to devise an organised programme for their return.

"We assured full cooperation to Pakistan and told them that we would never allow the criminals to hide in Afghanistan.

Afghan team holds talks on transit trade

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 18: Talks on a transit trade arrangement between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained inconclusive on Thursday as the two sides decided to continue consultations in future.

The visiting Afghan delegation, led by Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund, met Commerce Minister Abdul Razaq Dawood here and discussed with him matters pertaining to transit trade.

Both sides explained their views on operational aspects of the trade agreement and decided to continue consultation to evolve a viable strategy beneficial to both the countries.

The commerce minister said Pakistan was keen to help out its Afghan brethren in their hour of trial. The relations between the two countries would be strengthened through frequent consultations, he added.

NATION

18 MAY 2000

DAWN

19 MAY 2000

Taliban to extradite criminals, says FO

DAWN

By Hasan Akhtar 21 MAY 2000

ISLAMABAD, May 20: Afghanistan has indicated to Pakistan that it would extradite those identified by Islamabad as "the wanted criminals" and assured it that no terrorist camps, if so identified by Pakistan, would be permitted to operate from the Afghan soil, said Foreign Office spokesman Iftikhar Mushered on Saturday.

The spokesman said that Afghan Interior Minister Mullah Razaq Akhund during his visit here earlier this week had been informed that there were 10 to 12 such persons who were wanted by Pakistan. They had been identified during the minister's talks at the interior ministry.

The American request to Pakistan to get Osama bin Laden arrested to stand justice came up during the talks but Taliban maintained that the request was "unjustified" because none of the three options offered by Kabul was acceptable to the US.

Pakistan, the spokesman stated, could do nothing more than helping the US establish contact

with the Taliban authorities so that the two sides could talk directly to find a way out to resolve the Osama issue.

Referring to the positive results of the last month meeting held among various Afghan parties in Saudi Arabia under the auspices of the OIC, the spokesman noted with satisfaction the continued adherence by both sides not to raise level of fighting and to engage in exchange of all prisoners of war with the help of Red Cross.

But the Pakistan suggestion to scale down the list of items permissible under the Afghan Transport Agreement still remained unresolved. Islamabad had pointed out the ill effects of smuggling via Afghanistan, of about 18 items.

Expressing the hope that usual escalation in fighting with the advent of summer would not occur, the spokesman admitted that arms were reportedly being funnelled to the Northern Alliance from Russia and Central Asia.

Taliban renew aid appeal for drought affectees

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Tuesday renewed appeal for international aid to help the drought-stricken people in different parts of the war-shattered country.

Taliban's Deputy Foreign Minister Mulla Abdul Jalil, launching the appeal, said that around 80 per cent livestock has died and gardens withered and destroyed.

In a statement, released by the Afghan embassy Islamabad, the minister said that several people have also lost life. However, he did not mention number of the people died due to drought. He said thousands of people fled drought-hit areas for cities in search of food and shelter.

"The worst drought in Afghanistan confronted people with a lot of problems in South and Southwest of the country," Mulla Jalil said.

NATION

24 MAY 2000

New envoy to Afghanistan named

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, May 22: Mr Arif Ayub has been appointed as ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Mr Arif joined Foreign Service on Dec 1, 1973. He held various diplomatic assignments in Pakistan's Missions abroad. Since September 1997 he was serving as ambassador to Italy.

DAWN

23 MAY 2000

Afghan FM says 'Washington needs an enemy'

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Afghanistan Foreign Minister Mullah Wakil Motawakil has said that there were certain political motives behind the United Nations sanctions and the demand that the Taliban regime handed over Osama bin Laden, the Saudi dissident Washington alleges was responsible for the bombing of its embassies in Tanzania and Kenya in 1998.

"The United States just cannot tolerate an independent and Islamic Afghanistan."

Washington needs an enemy; it is a requirement of American foreign policy, and we have been chosen as the enemy.

NATION

22 MAY 2000

Taliban tell German team they respect human rights

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - The Taliban Foreign Minister Maulvi Wakil Ahmed Mutawakil has told the visiting German parliamentary delegation that Islamic Emirate was fully respecting human rights in its controlled areas in the war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Talking to the German parliamentary delegation, which called on him at Kabul, Mutawakil said that Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has constituted anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics commissions. He said that international news agencies are spreading false and baseless propaganda against the Islamic Emirate.

He said that Islamic Emirate wants end of war and restoration of lasting peace in Afghanistan.

NATION

31 MAY 2000

Moscow's threat to Kabul

DAWN 27 MAY 2000

By Afzaal Mahmood

MOSCOW's warning that it could carry out air strikes against the suspected Chechen guerrilla training camps in Afghanistan provides a clue to the new aggressive posture Russia's foreign policy is likely to assume under President Vladimir Putin.

Despite sharp criticism from opposition deputies in Moscow, Putin's top spokesman on Chechnya has refused to back down on his warning to Afghanistan. Ruling out armed intervention against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the spokesman reiterated the earlier warning by adding "Russia could use technical means", an apparent reference to air or missile strikes. His threat has been confirmed by Russia's foreign minister who said that the Kremlin was serious about preventive strikes against Afghanistan if a security threat from there against Russia did not abate.

Though the Communist Party leader Zyuganov has branded the Kremlin official's statement as "completely irresponsible", an indirect support for the Russian warning has been provided by a leading member of the liberal opposition, Yabloko, who is also the deputy head of the Duma's defence committee. Referring to the US strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan, Yabloko seems to have argued that since the international community did not condemn them, Russia has a precedent to follow. Moreover, as Mr Putin is at present riding a wave of popularity within the country, any criticism from the opposition parties is not going to deter him from carrying out his threat.

The reaction from the Taliban government has been predictable. Shrugging off the warning and vowing that they would continue to extend "moral backing" for the Chechen fighters, the Taliban have warned that the neighbouring countries providing air strike facilities to Russia will be equally responsible for aggression against the people of Afghanistan. But, like the Americans, the Russians can launch missile attacks against Afghanistan though they may not be as accurate and effective as air strikes.

Reacting to reports about the Russian threat, the Pakistan foreign office spokesman reiterated that during Pakistan's contacts with the Afghan leaders, the latter have denied the presence of any military training camps in Afghanistan. He also referred to Kabul's repeated assurances that it would not allow the Afghan soil to be used for hostile activities against any country. The foreign office spokesman thought that the actions contemplated by Russia could prove potentially destabilizing for the whole region.

The Russian threat should be taken seriously because it has grown out of Moscow's

frustration at its failure to bring the fighting in Chechnya to a quick end. One of the slogans, which had a strong impact in ensuring a sweeping victory for Putin in the presidential election, was his promise to quickly crush the Chechen rebellion. Since there seems to be no inclination on his part to find a peaceful solution of the Chechen problem, the possibility of Moscow's carrying out the threatened air strikes against Afghanistan cannot be ruled out.

The West's reaction to the conflict in Chechnya has betrayed double standards. Surprisingly, the Americans and their allies have not been as strongly and meaningfully concerned about Chechnya as they were about Kosovo, even though the conflict in Chechnya has involved greater casualties and more repressive measures. The dictates of realpolitik have not allowed them to go beyond occasional calls for a peaceful solution of the Chechen problem. By a twist of semantics, the "freedom fighters" of Kosovo have been turned, in the western eyes, into "the rebels" of Chechnya for them to be treated differently. President Clinton felt no compunction about approving Russia's right to "oppose violent Chechen rebels."

Russia is in the process of a historic transi-

The Russian threat should be taken seriously because it has grown out of Moscow's frustration at its failure to bring the fighting in Chechnya to a quick end. Since there seems to be no inclination on Putin's part to find a peaceful solution to the Chechen problem, the possibility of Moscow carrying out the threatened air strikes against Afghanistan cannot be ruled out.

tion. The process has received a fillip after the election of Mr Putin as Mr Yeltsin's successor. Some of his pronouncements since he came to power have caused serious concern among some of Russia's neighbours, particularly the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. For instance, in his inaugural address Mr Putin proudly recalled Russia's imperial tradition which enabled Russia to expand into a vast empire, extending over several time zones in a span of 400 years. "We must always remember those who created the Russian state, championed its dignity and made it a great, powerful and mighty state."

This attitude was reflected in a Russian national security policy document adopted on October 3, 1999, when Putin was prime minister. It speaks of the need "to create a single economic domain with the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States", and in that context refers to all the constituent republics of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltic states which, too, are under constant pres-

sure from Moscow. It is significant that the document does not define what is meant by a single domain. Even if it were possible to confine the proposed grouping to the economic field, it would certainly be resisted by almost all the former subject states of the ex-Soviet Union.

Three ex-Soviet republics — Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan — opted out of the 1992 treaty on collective security last year to assert their independence. President Vladimir Putin has renewed his efforts to create "a single domain" within the geographical boundaries of the former Soviet Union. He recently presided over a meeting of the leaders of five ex-Soviet republics in Minsk to intensify cooperation on security issues to fend off perceived new threats from terrorism, Islamic extremism and drugs and arms smuggling. Besides Belarus and Armenia, three Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan attended the meeting.

Turkmenistan was conspicuous by its absence. The nine documents adopted at the meeting set down the terms of joint intervention to defend the members' interests, including peace-keeping missions and the use of force.

The possibilities are that Mr Putin, by using pressure tactics, may make independence so painful for the former Soviet republics that the "return to the Russian womb" will appear to them as the lesser of the two evils. For that he has several pressure points to use: the presence of Russian troops (almost every former breakaway state has Russian troops stationed on its soil), incitement of civil wars (as in Georgia and Tajikistan) and the use of economic pressures since the economies of landlocked Central Asian republics are almost totally dependent on Russian support.

Only recently Turkey's deputy prime minister Devlet Banceli accused Russia of destabilizing Central Asia and the Caucasus by seeking to restore control over the former Soviet republics. "A region of peace and stability cannot stand and watch an approach that means the effective revival of the Soviet Union", he said. It may be recalled that Turkish and Russian rivalry over the Caucasus is many centuries old.

The threat of punitive strikes against Afghanistan should be seen as part of Mr Putin's efforts to re-establish control over the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. Fears of the spread of Islamic extremism, particularly in states bordering on Afghanistan, can prompt some of them to seek close ties with Moscow for protection.

Uzbekistan, which opted out of the 1992 security treaty last year, is moving closer to Moscow to tackle what it perceives as a threat from extremist groups like the Taliban. The air strikes threat may also be designed to bolster the sagging morale of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.

Taliban flay warning

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban Tuesday condemned a warning from Russia of possible airstrikes against suspected Islamic training camps in Afghanistan.

An Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Faiz Ahmad Faiz shrugged off the warning and vowed that the Islamic militia would continue to extend "moral backing" for the Chechen rebels.

He was commenting on a statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin's top spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky on Monday. 'Such statements by the Russians is not something new. The Russians have always openly interfered in Afghan internal affairs,' Faiz said, blaming Moscow for the ongoing 20-year war in Afghanistan.

'Therefore the Afghan people condemn the interference by Russians or by any one else under any guise in the Afghan internal affairs,' he said. 'They morally back the just cause of the Muslim Chechen State,' Faiz said.

Putin's spokesman on Monday did not rule out possible strikes

against suspected training camps in Afghanistan. 'We might possibly carry out preventative strikes if there is a serious threat to Russia's national interests, or a threat to the national interests of countries in the region which have friendly relations with Russia,' Yastrzhembsky said. The Taliban spokesman also dismissed remarks by Putin's spokesman that the Islamic militia and suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden had agreed to provide weapons and men to Chechnya's separatist rebels.

Faiz said that the Taliban could not help the Chechen rebels because the militia lacked resources and because of the long distance between Chechnya and Afghanistan.

'What they say is not true,' Faiz said, adding that bin Laden was not allowed to operate against anybody from the Afghan territory.

Representatives of Chechen separatist President Aslan Maskhadov held talks with a senior Taliban official and bin Laden about a week ago in the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif, Yastrzhembsky said.

Countries helping Russia could face retaliation: Taliban

KABUL (AFP) - Afghanistan's ruling Taliban warned its northern neighbours on Thursday against helping Russia in its threatened air strikes on suspected terrorist training camps inside Afghanistan.

The Afghan Foreign Ministry said in a statement the ruling Islamic militia reserved the right to reciprocate against such countries.

Though it did not name any specific state, the statement amounted to a veiled warning for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

'If Russia carries out its threatened strikes against Afghanistan, this attack will take place through the air space of Afghanistan's neighbours,' the statement said. 'Such countries will be considered enemies by the Afghan people.'

On Wednesday, Russian Defence Ministry sources were quoted as saying Moscow had drawn up plans to deliver rocket and airstrikes against suspected training camps in Afghanistan.

The Taliban statement described Moscow's threat as an attempt by the Kremlin to save Afghan ex-President Burhanuddin Rabbani, who heads anti-Taliban forces holding out against the ruling militia in the northeast.

The Taliban, who control most of the country, accuse Rabbani and his military strongman Ahmad Shah Masood of receiving Moscow's military aid.

Taliban warn Uzbekistan of reprisal

ISLAMABAD, May 27: Uzbekistan will pay a heavy price "if any attacks are carried out against Afghanistan, Taliban leader Mulla Mohammad Omar warned on Sunday.

"There will be serious consequences for Uzbekistan and it will be made to pay a heavy price for aggression," he said.

Omar is saying in a statement from Kandahar.

He said the Taliban were aware of plan to migrate refugees camp in Afghanistan, or which Russia would claim the responsibility at the international level.

"We will hold Uzbekistan responsible for any attacks and there will be a fierce reaction," Omar said.

The statement denied there were any Chechen training camps on Taliban-held territory.

On Friday Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said Moscow would take measures "with its partners" to reduce tensions created by the situation in Afghanistan.-AFP

28 MAY 2000

DAWN

NATION 26 MAY 2000

Omar delivers stern warning to Uzbekistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) — Uzbekistan will pay a heavy price if any attack is carried out against Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban leader Mulla Mohammad Omar warned Saturday.

There will be serious consequences for Uzbekistan and it will pay a heavy price for aggression, the Afghan Islamic Press quoted Omar as saying in a statement from Kandahar in south.

He said the Taliban would claim the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to be responsible for any attacks and there will be a fierce reaction, Omar said.

The statement, the latest in a series of warnings by the ruling Taliban, training camps in Chechnya and elsewhere, was issued after this year and allowed it to open its mission in Kabul, ending on

other Muslim countries to follow suit.

On Friday Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said Moscow would take measures with its part in the situation in Afghanistan.

He said the forces which support international terrorism and extremism in Afghanistan have a free hand.

Russia has accused the Taliban of training Chechen guerrillas fighting for independence and of supporting militants in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

However, the tension could be resolved by diplomatic negotiations, the UN, Ivanov said.

His comment came after US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned Russia against launching strikes against launching forces in Moscow.

Earlier, Russia's top border official, Konstantin Dasky, criticised the Taliban to launch attacks on Afghanistan.

"I do not want the activities of the Taliban to lead to pre-emptive strikes against Afghanistan, as this would seriously worsen the border situation in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan," he told a press conference in Moscow.

NATION

28 MAY 2000

'Calm in Kabul an uneasy one'

By Mobarik Virk

ISLAMABAD – This year it is a much calmer start to the summer as compared with what had been witnessed in the preceding years. This appears to be a positive indicator in the backdrop of the recent meeting held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, between Taliban and the Northern Alliance. Pakistan also participated in the meeting through a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Office.

But, at the same time huge amounts of armaments are being funneled in both the sides which makes the situation more and more explosive and can lead to resumption of major attacks on each other's positions at any time.

In the Jeddah meeting both Taliban and the Northern Alliance agreed on a number of issues. An agreement was reached for the comprehensive exchange of prisoners of war between the two groups through the International Committee for Red Crescent (ICRC).

A committee was also formed comprising representatives from Pakistan, Iran, the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) which will step in if there is a conflict on the issue. Through another agreement both

Taliban and the Northern Alliance agreed to permit the movement of convoys of the United Nations and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) carrying humanitarian aids and relief goods to help people in the drought hit areas.

The two sides also agreed not to target civilians and civil targets in case any hostilities break out in future as well as to exercise maximum restraint to prevent hostilities which may lead to a full fledged military action between Taliban and the Northern Alliance.

However, the sources in the Pakistan Foreign Office are apprehensive that the two sides are far apart as ever on major issues. But, they added, this does not prevent Pakistan to continue to play its role for peace in Afghanistan.

The sources said that the Northern Alliance has refused to accept the demand of Taliban to surrender the arms.

Similarly, Northern Alliance has refused to accepting Mullah Omar as Ameerul Momneen while the both the sides have rejected the idea of setting up a tripartite government comprising Taliban, the Northern Alliance and the Afghans living outside the country.

Taliban forcibly remove 12 doctors from Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR – As a result of undue pressure at hands of Taliban leaders, 12 leading physicians and doctors were compelled to leave their Afghanistan a report informed on Sunday.

According to reports, the medical institutions of Afghanistan lack books and other documented materials.

In this connection, former Vice Afghan Consul General at Peshawar Mr. Wali Naeemi through his efforts collected some 5,000 books for medical and engineering students from Afghans residing in United States and other foreign countries in 1997-98, but the students are still facing deficiency of books and other printed materials.

In the light of such complaints and difficulties, Taliban authorities have directed some 13 doctors to compile a book within two days.

However, all of them have expressed inability of doing so in a shortest time.

Soon after in retaliation, the Afghan Health Minister had ordered shuttering of private clinics of these doctors and said that they would not be allowed to work in any part of Kabul or other cities of the country.

And 12 out of 13 doctors, serving the Medical Faculty at Kabul and other hospitals.

NATION

NATION

15 MAY 2000

Taliban soldiers humiliate doctor

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - A physician from Ghanikhel area of the border Nangarhar province of Afghanistan was badly humiliated by Taliban soldiers without any crime.

Dr Hasham, a physician who preferred to serve his countrymen instead of going abroad was arrested by Taliban soldiers a few days ago.

He was charged of having links with a new front being established with a purpose to substitute Taliban in Afghanistan. Such a front is being headed by Abdul Qahar Shariati so far but some heavy weights even those who have served in the regimes of former king Mohammad Zahir Shah and Sardar Daud Khan are supporting the front.

After arresting him, the Afghan physician was badly beaten up and tortured by Taliban. The Taliban soldiers, guarding the Afghans have asked the common people to refrain themselves of becoming parties to the conspiracies being hatched against Taliban, otherwise, they would face the same consequences.

NATION
02 MAY 2000

Kabul zoo presents ghastly spectacle

KABUL (AFP) - Kabul zoo, once a frontline in Afghanistan's factional fighting, has become a virtual torture chamber for the animals which survived the strife.

Weak and emaciated, the zoo's monkeys are constantly tormented by visitors who are allowed to shout at the animals and prod them with sticks in full view of guards who show little concern for their plight. Quizzed about their indifference, the keepers say they have simply grown weary of telling visitors to stop torturing the animals.

A blind lion, a black bear, seven monkeys, 20 rabbits, five foxes, four wolves, two hawks, two falcons, three vultures, nine owls, a deer, a snake and several pigeons make up the zoo's depleted population. Many animals were killed in fighting before the ruling Taliban routed rival groups from the Afghan capital in 1996.

NATION
25 MAY 2000

Powerful blast rocks Kabul

KABUL (AFP) - A powerful blast at a Taliban military base rocked Kabul early Friday, residents and soldiers said.

The blast occurred at the Taliban military division No. 16 in the northern Khair Khana area after sunrise, Taliban soldiers guarding the base said.

They said a container of ammunition exploded scattering shrapnel to the nearby dwellings, but there were no casualties. The site was later inspected by senior Taliban authorities.

The soldiers described the blast as an accident and said no one had been arrested as yet.

A room full of timber caught fire, sending up a column of smoke, they said.

The Taliban, who took Kabul in 1996, control most of the country. They are battling the forces of the Afghan ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood.

NATION
27 MAY 2000

No let-up in repatriation of Afghan refugees from NWFP

PESHAWAR (APP) — The repatriation of Afghan refugees is continuing with the same pace from NWFP, however, the repatriation process has been stopped in Balochistan due to droughts in Afghanistan.

This was stated by Additional Commissioner Repatriation Afghan Commissionerate Peshawar Col (Retd) Abdul Hafeez while talking to APP here on Saturday.

Giving month wise break up of the Afghan refugees' families repatriated so far since January 2000, he told that in January 2000, a total of 144 families repatriated comprising 823 individuals (family members), followed by 190 families in February (1386 family members), March 587 families comprising 3282 family members and 1611 families in April which were consisted of 9733 individuals.

In reply to a question, Col (Retd) Abdul Hafeez said that each family was given Rs.5000 as repatriation grant besides 300 kg wheat and a Tarpaulin at UNHCR offices in Jalalabad, Khost and at other points in Afghanistan.

He told that the verification of

the returning families was carried out by the UNHCR at four verification points.

These points have been established in Nawa Pass Bajaur Agency, Takhta Baig Jamrud in Khyber Agency, Ali Zai in Parachinar Kurram Agency and Ghulam Khan in Miran Shah North Waziristan Agency, he added.

To a question, he said, each head of the family is to submit three passport size photograph at these verification points where three forms were issued which were duly filled by the UNHCR officials.

Of the three forms, two were kept in verification centres while one was given to the head of the family which he submitted in the respective UNHCR offices in Afghanistan and thus become eligible for obtaining repatriation grant and 300 kg wheat and a Tarpaulin.

He told that repatriation of refugees is taking place in two different manners, in the shape of family members and groups. He elaborated that Afghan refugees groups comprising 400 to 600 individuals also repatriated to their

country and they were provided repatriation grant in the camps. This is called targeted group repatriation, he added.

About the fresh influx of Afghan refugees, Col (Retd) Abdul Hafeez said, about 2 to 3 families entered Pakistan daily from the Northern parts of Afghanistan where forces of Ahmed Shah Masood and Taliban militia are engaged in heavy fighting.

Haji Javed nominated IHRC chief for Pakistan

The International Human Rights Commission (IHRC) has nominated former NWFP minister Haji Mohammad Javed as Ambassador of Human Rights in Pakistan with all the authority and privileges of country president.

This announcement was made by Mohammad Shahid Amin Khan World chairman of IHRC who held a detail meeting with Haji Javed here at his residence at Peshawar on Saturday. Haji Mohammad Javed is expected to resume his office after taking oath as Ambassador of Human Rights at Human Rights Commission World Report launching ceremony to be held at Karachi on May 20 next.

Drought: UNHCR suspends Afghan repatriation plan

ISLAMABAD (PPI) — United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR) has suspended repatriation of refugees to Southern Afghanistan following the worst drought hitting the region, UN sources said here on Friday.

The UNHCR had planned to repatriate over 1,70,000 Afghan refugees from Pakistan during the current summer.

According to the sources, in the worst drought to strike Afghanistan since 1971, the hardest hit area, so far, is southern Afghanistan, with a belt of severe drought in Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgon and Nimroz.

Meanwhile, the Taliban administration has evacuated between 2,000 and 6,000 families from Registan by truck over the last three months, of whom about 80

families have taken refuge in Kandahar city.

Previously local authorities were also assisting in transporting livestock, for example in the direction of Herat, but they are now concentrating on rescuing humans.

The evacuation of Kochis has now stopped since the trucks can no longer get into the desert due to deteriorating road conditions. Those who remain may be evacuated by helicopter.

The local authorities also hope to provide some food assistance, which may need to be supplemented if the newly displaced stay in Kandahar, and have vaccinated 50,000 animals.

Some Kochi families have already migrated to various areas of Afghanistan in search of fodder for their animals.

NATION
6 MAY 2000

UNHCR repatriation plan

Afghan DPs give positive response

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 22: Afghan refugees have responded positively to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Tehran government jointly sponsored programme for the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan.

The programme initiated on April 8 to address the problem of undocumented refugees, has raised the weekly repatriation figure to more than 4,500, one of the largest returns in recent times. Since the launch of the programme more than 18,000 Afghans have returned to home while 12,000 who fear to return home have filed claims to regularise their presence in Iran.

According to the Islamabad office of the UN co-ordinator for Afghanistan, the programme which was agreed between the UNHCR and Iran on Feb 14, for the first time offered undocumented Afghans a true choice: to return home or normalise their presence in Iran.

Afghans who opt for voluntary repatriation receives material assistance and free passage to Afghanistan in safety and dignity. Afghans who are unable to return have the right

to present their claims at screening centres where they would be examined by teams jointly appointed by UNHCR and Iran and those considered to be in need of protection granted a stay in Iran.

To put the programme into action, UNHCR and its government counter-part BAFIA have established voluntary repatriation and screening centres in areas with large Afghan presence. Three voluntary repatriation centres have already been opened in Tehran, Mashad and Zahedan, where refugees who wish to return are provided with information and assistance.

Screening centres have also been opened in the same three stations to receive the claims from Afghans for protection. Successful applicants will obtain permits that will allow them to temporarily stay in Iran until conditions in Afghanistan are conducive to return.

Rejected ones would have a second chance. They have the right to lodge an appeal within 10 days and have their cases re-examined by a separate committee composed of representatives from UNHCR and BAFIA, whose decision would be final.

DAWN 23 MAY 2000

Turks kill 9 Afghans near border

ANKARA, May 10: Turkish soldiers killed nine Afghans and wounded five when they opened fire on a group trying to cross into Turkey from Iran, the Anatolia news agency reported on Wednesday.

The incident occurred late Tuesday near the northern tip of the Turkish-Iranian border close to the eastern town of Dogubeyazit, said the agency.

Turkish troops opened fire on a group of 153 Afghan immigrants when they refused to obey verbal warnings to stop, it added. The remaining 139 immigrants were detained.

Turkish officials told Anatolia the group was fleeing the Taliban and had paid 700 dollars each to an Iranian gang.

A second group of would-be immigrants, among them 40 Iraqis and six Afghans, were nabbed in the eastern province of Bitlis on buses bound for Istanbul, Anatolia reported.

The agency did not specify from which country they had crossed into Turkey.

Turkey, which acts as a major transit route for illegal immigrants from Asia in search of a better life in Europe, had often been criticized by western European countries for failing to curb the influx of immigrants.—AFP

DAWN

11 MAY 2000

More Afghan refugees expected

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 4: The federal government apprehends fresh influx of Afghan refugees if the on-going drought in many parts of Afghanistan aggravates and no immediate relief is provided.

Secretary of state for frontier regions & Kashmir affairs Javed Akram while talking to Dawn denied that anybody had so far moved to Pakistan but said: "We do have fears in the back of our mind."

The WFP has said that severe drought has hit Zabul, Kandahar, Nimroz and Helmand in Afghanistan.

In the apparent situation the people may not choose to leave their own drought-hit area and go to another area which itself was facing drought but the possibility of better relief operation in Pakistan would be a great attraction for many Afghans.

DAWN

05 MAY 2000

Afghans outnumber locals in Attock

From Our Correspondent

SANJWAL CANTT — A large number of Afghan refugees have turned Attock city into a mini-Afghanistan. According to details, illegal Turkmen-raced Afghan settlers are giving Attock city look like a mini-Afghanistan. Most of the areas of Attock city Mohallah Bijli Ghar, Dar-ul-Islam colony, People's Colony, Moh. Awan Sharif, Moh. Shed, Moh Mehrpura east and west and so on are heavily occupied by these Afghan settlers. Their population in most of the mohallas is larger than the local inhabitants. They are running their shops, carpet weaving industries etc without any let or hindrance. An estimate revealed that their number exceeds 1 million.

NATION

15 MAY 2000

NATION 12 MAY 2000

Drought halts Afghans repatriation process

From Shamim Shahid

PESHAWAR — The repatriation process being initiated by the United Nations High Commission for Afghan Refugees (UNHCR) has received a severe blow due to worst kind of drought in Afghanistan.

The UNHCR has initiated repatriation for 20,000 in previous April and was expecting return of some 200,000 Afghans from both Pakistan and Iran. In the beginning, the UNHCR officials have received very positive response and in previous April some 30,000 Afghans were repatriated from both the neighbouring countries.

However, due to continuous dry spell in all over South Asian region, the repatriation process of Afghan refugees to their motherland was affected.

Most of southern provinces of Afghanistan, adjacent with Balochistan are affected by drought. And likewise is the situation in south-eastern and eastern provinces of that war-affected country. Like of Sindh and Balochistan, war-affected Afghans are also hunting for drinking water at Kabul and other places. A recent re-

port reveals that due to drought, some of the returned Afghan families are again migrating to Pakistan.

A recent UNICEF report states that average 11 per cent of hand-dug wells with hand pumps were dry in western Afghanistan, while in Pashtoon Zarghun district 40 per cent of the wells are dry. In southern Afghanistan, an average of 10 per cent of dug or bore wells are dry.

As in the west, however, the average receives enormous variation. For example, over 60 per cent of the wells in Khashrod district of Nimroz province have run dry, same is the case with Maiwand district of Kandahar. The findings are based on situation analysis done by the Rural Rehabilitation and Development Department and the NGO DACCAR.

It further states that UNICEF is now heading a technical working group which has put together a plan of action for safe drinking water to the most drought affected districts of Kandahar and Zabul provinces. The prepared plan was based on the pledges made by

UNDCP/ERD, UNICEF and DACCAR for the provision of 83,000 dollars. The project, which will deepen/drill 250 wells, will benefit some 75,000 people in eight districts.

Meanwhile, in Kandahar a hand pumps has been installed while seven boring machines are to dig the wells for more hand pumps working.

The UN weekly Update reveals that 644 families have been repatriated from Pakistan. Amongst them 385 families have received the UNHCR standard repatriation package at Jalalabad and 259 families have received the repatriation package at Khost. Similarly, the report has also confirmed that during this period 8324 persons have been repatriated from Islamic Republic of Iran. However, due to drought which reduced availability of water in all over Afghanistan, no new group had repatriated to the country.

Meanwhile, Haji Yaqoot Khan Shinwari an Afghan journalist residing at Kohat informed that due to drought and lack of proper living conditions a large number of

Afghan families have been remigrated. Such families were earlier repatriated to Zazai Maidan area of Paktya province. He added that most of these remigrated families have adjusted themselves with their relatives in Hangu and Kohat towns.

Quoting the returning families, Mr. Shinwari stated that beside acute shortage of water, the repatriated Afghans are facing employment and are not provided with the health and education facilities. They added that all infrastructure, particularly the agriculture field have been devastated. While in state offices, Taliban are demanding bribe for providing employment and releasing of their meagre monthly salaries.

No one is in a position to debate with Taliban or oppose their directives. Like former Jehadic commanders, Taliban stalwarts and soldiers have also established their own prison houses in their controlled areas. In such circumstances, it is impossible for the Afghans to stay away in their war-affected homes and villages, Mr. Shinwari concluded.

Afghan plane
passengers in
legal bid to stay
in UK

LONDON (AFP) — Passengers from a hijacked Afghan airliner which landed in Britain in February, are launching a legal bid here Monday to stay in this country.

A three-member immigration panel began hearing immigration appeals between them and the British Home Secretary last week. Six dozen Afghans, including men, women and children, are seeking asylum. The appeal is against a refusal to grant them political asylum. The appeal is against a refusal to grant them political asylum.

Refugees are expected to stay in the UK for four weeks. Barry Stowe, director of the Home Office, said that the Afghan plane, representing the Afghan cause, represented a country with no constitution and no rule of law.

In refusing these cases, the Home Secretary is arguing that these people can be safely removed to a country with no constitution and no rule of law.

An Airlines plane, hijacked in early February, landed in London. The plane was hijacked in early February, landed in London. The plane was hijacked in early February, landed in London.

After flying to Moscow, the plane was re-routed to Afghanistan. The plane was re-routed to Afghanistan. The plane was re-routed to Afghanistan.

NATION

09 MAY 2000

WFP plans to help 400,000 Afghans

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 2: Hundreds of thousands of Afghans need immediate help to survive a severe drought hitting their country for the second consecutive year, the UN World Food Programme said on Tuesday.

The situation had forced a large number of Afghans to consider moving to Pakistan, it said.

"There are no walking skeletons yet, but without an adequate response thousands of Afghans in the southern provinces would face a merciless summer after having lost almost all their rain-fed wheat crops and up to 80 per cent of their livestock due to the lack of precipitation," a WFP press release quoted Afghan country director Mike Sackett as saying.

Mr Sackett, who had a three-day visit to the provinces of Zabul and Kandahar last week, said there was a clear need now to expand humanitarian assistance and include food aid for destitute villages that could engage in self-help projects such as well digging or clearing the underground irrigation channels.

The WFP, he said, planned to

feed more than 400,000 people who were the poorest and most needy, for the coming 12 months until the first harvest began in June 2001. Some 30,000 tons of food would be distributed.

The rainy season in Afghanistan was over and with many of the wells dry or their water having declined to an extremely deep level, these provinces were unlikely to receive any more rain before November.

The most hit provinces were Zabul, Kandahar, Nimroz and Helmand where more than four million people lived. Shrivelled wheat, due to the lack of water, occupied thousands of hectares in southern Afghanistan. Arghistan and Arghaband Rivers that should be in full stream this time of the year were dry. People depended on the few remaining springs and some of the wells for drinking water, said Mr Sackett.

Some of the wheat fields irrigated by underground water channels seemed to have partly survived the drought. Eighty per cent of the livestock in the past few months was lost at the

Lagharai village in Kandahar alone. Carcasses were scattered along nearby roads, he said.

At the Abo Kala village in Zabul, he said, people resorted to eating the boiled roots of Alfalfa. Many trees in and around the Sikhwandar village died.

Many villagers were considering moving their families to Pakistan, the WFP said. But, it added, the same drought had already struck across the border. The WFP suggested the need to stabilize these people where they were and help them survive the harsh conditions without a major dislocation.

The WFP acknowledged the high level of social cohesion in the affected villages where well off people often assisted their less fortunate neighbours.

Kuchis, the nomads of Afghanistan, have been facing even worse conditions. Solely depending on livestock, the economic structure for thousands of those people disintegrated with the increasingly high rate of animal mortality. Those who lost all the animals could be seen pitching their tents near urban centres like the Kandahar city.

Afghans need urgent help to survive drought, warns WFP

NATION 03 MAY 2000

ISLAMABAD (PR) - Hundreds of thousands of poor Afghans need urgent assistance to survive the harsh conditions of a severe drought hitting this war-torn country for the second consecutive year, the UN World Food Programme warned on Tuesday.

"There are no walking skeletons yet, but without an adequate response, thousands of Afghans in the southern provinces would face a merciless summer after having lost almost all their rain fed wheat crops and up to 80 per cent of their livestock due to the lack of precipitation," said Mike Sackett, WFP Afghanistan Country Director, after a three-day inspection visit to the provinces of Zabul and Kandahar last week.

Due to a similar severe drought last year, WFP started an emergency food distribution in South Afghanistan in February helping about 200,000 people for the last

two months. "We plan to provide another 3,000 tonnes of wheat flour for these families in May," Sackett said.

"But, there is a clear need now to extend and expand humanitarian assistance and include food aid for destitute villages that could engage in self-help projects such as well digging or clearing the Karezes (underground water irrigation channels)."

This is why WFP plans to feed more than 400,000 people, who are the poorest and most needy, for the coming 12 months until the first harvest begins in June 2001. This effort will require the distribution of some 30,000 tonnes of food.

"We will be able to help only the most needy and poor hungry people with food, but WFP can only do so much. There is a clear need for drinking water, health services and other technical support for the worst hit communities to help

them support themselves over the coming months," Sackett said.

The rain season in Afghanistan is over and with many of the wells either dry or their waters having declined to an extremely deep level, these provinces are unlikely to receive any more rain before November. The next harvest will be in the summer of 2001.

The most hit provinces are Zabul, Kandahar, Nimroz, and Helmand, where more than four million people live.

Shrivelled wheat, due to the lack of water, occupied thousands of hectares in southern Afghanistan, Rivers, like Arghistan and Arghaband that should be in full stream this time of the year are dry. People depend on the few remaining springs and some of the deep wells for drinking water. Only some of the wheat fields irrigated by underground water channels seem to have partly survived the

severe drought.

In Lagharai village, Kandahar province, villagers told a visiting WFP team that they have lost 30 per cent of their livestock in the past few months. Animal carcasses were scattered along nearby roads. In Abo Kala village, Zabul province, people resorted to eating the boiled roots of Alfalfa (an animal fodder). In Sikhwandar, also in Zabul, many apricot trees have died while almond trees, a mainstay of the rural economy, were badly affected by the drought. There will be no harvest this year in many villages in these provinces. Many villagers are considering moving all their families to Pakistan, but the same drought has already struck across the borders.

"We need to stabilise these people where they are and help them survive these harsh conditions, without a major dislocation," Sackett said.

03 MAY 2000
DAWN

OIC, Pakistan & Iran to assist in exchange of prisoners

UN hopes for positive result of Jeddah talks

ISLAMABAD (APP) — UN Secretary General's special envoy on Afghanistan, Francesco Vendrill has hoped that talks between Taliban and their opponents being held in Jeddah, would yield positive result.

In an interview with Voice of America (VOA), Vendrill expressed satisfaction that the two sides were able to evolve consensus on at least one issue.

He said, the talks were very short, but both sides agreed on exchange of prisoners.

Vendrill said, contact has been established with the ICRC to contact the two warring sides for implementing the agreement, adding, "We hope that agreement would soon be implemented."

Asked if the exchange of prisoners was a step towards solution, he said, the step may be treated as a humanitarian step which would create confidence between the two sides, if implemented.

"I do not say that it means progress in the peace process.

But I think there are certain steps before the peace talks which are essential and the exchange of prisoners is one of them," he added.

Vendrill said, he participated the talks as an observer and the talks were actually held under the mediation of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), presently headed by Iran.

Asked as to what issues were discussed and what were the problems, the UN SG envoy said, other

issues discussed were that civilian people should not be the targets of war and both sides agreed to honour this point.

He said, another issue was to ensure smooth flow of aid supplies. The OIC and the UN appealed the two sides not to launch major offensives.

Vendrill said the talks would continue and the head of the OIC team would fix the date for the next round after talks with both sides.

Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), Pakistan and Iran will assist International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) in exchange of prisoners in Afghanistan.

This was stated by leader of the mission of OIC Zarf who attended the talks between Taliban and their opponents held in Jeddah, Radio Tehran reported.

He said both sides on the conclusion of second session of second round of talks in Jeddah have agreed on the exchange of prisoners.

He added Afghan groups were urged to remove the obstacles in the way of delivery of humanitarian assistance like food and medicines to people and stop targeting the civilian population.

NNI adds: Afghanistan ruling Taliban have floated 10 proposals to the OIC in the indirect Jeddah talks with opposition northern alliance to solve the Afghan conflict.

Ameer Khan Muttaqi, head of the Taliban negotiation team hopes that the OIC sponsored talks would

continue and succeed in ending foreign interference and flow of arms to Afghanistan. Muttaqi says Taliban team presented ten proposals including continuation of the present talks, assuring that they are ready to continue these talks and find solution to the problems. However, the opposition ended the session.

He said the OIC seat should be given to the Islamic Emirate.

"We also demanded OIC role in condemning and lifting UN sanctions against Afghanistan".

He said the Taliban team demanded of the OIC to call upon the international community to extend help to the drought stricken people of Afghanistan.

"We also demanded that the OIC should pursue the agreement reached for exchange of prisoners so that it is properly implemented. The OIC was also asked to end foreign interference in Afghanistan.

Our delegation demanded that the OIC office for Afghanistan in Islamabad should be shifted inside Afghanistan.

"We asked the OIC that the neighbouring countries, which are supporting certain groups, should be asked to give up this unilateral policy.

"We also asked them to strengthen a central Islamic government and that individual groups and personalities should not be strengthened. We wanted continuation of talks but, unfortunately, no agreement was affected except exchange of prisoners".



Sitting amongst the ruins of a house in Chechen capital, Grozny

The Russian threat

NATION

30 MAY 2000

Dr Samiullah Koreshi

The first Russian threat to bomb Afghanistan was made on 21st May. This warning was renewed on May 24 again. It was further said that should a decision to do so was made, the Russian planes were ready to implement it immediately.

Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, said on May 23 at Belarus, that there are "various" options, including the air strikes. Another important member of the National Security Council said "Russia should not exclude anything from its arsenal." This has been interpreted in some circles as use of nuclear missiles as well against Afghanistan.

Reports after the NATO meeting in Italy indicate that Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov was still in the same bellicose mood. He said that the threat did not come up in his discussions with US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright.

Does Russia intend to implement its threat in some form or the other? It is swarmed by the Chechen mountain bees. It has failed to stamp out the Chechen rebellion now going on since September 1999. Most of the Chechen *mujahideen* have moved to the mountains after being driven out from the flatlands while the Russians have been bogged down in the Chechen mountains with no early victory in sight. It will be recalled that the Russians were driven out of Chechnya in the 1994-96 war with the *mujahideen* and are haunted by a continued mountain war for long period. Therefore, there is a possibility that Russia might implement its threat in some way or the other Russia tries to justify these

planned air raids on the excuse that Afghanistan is helping the Chechens. Sergie, Yastrzhembrsky, a top Kremlin spokesman, alleged that Russian intelligence had evidence that Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden have signed an agreement to aid the Chechen *mujahideen*.

The other plea is based on the alleged Afghanistan activities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which border Afghanistan.

The Russian threat and its implementation will be discussed in Clinton-Putin summit meeting in Moscow on June 3-5. However, one can be sure that Russia, as reincarnation of USSR, and USA are bed fellows in the refined neo-imperialist gun boat diplomacy in Afghanistan and Central Asian region where their policies coincide. Should Russia really go for such a reckless and aggressive action against Afghanistan it would be a very dangerous development. We need to examine its various implications. Actually, at the centre of Russian attitude to the Chechnya war are two issues: first the policy to eliminate the Chechens' struggle, armed or otherwise, and second Russia's policy to retain the same hold on Central Asia that USSR had over them, or to deny them their independence by making them mere 'autonomous regions' under Russian suzerainty. Unless these underlying objectives in Russian moves are explained the latest Russian threats to Afghanistan would not become clear.

Chechens have a very long history of national resistance against Russian imperialism; it has been there since 1700 AD when Peter I embarked on

his expansionist policies towards Persia. Neither Afghanistan nor Osama bin Laden were there about four centuries ago. When Hitler's Army could form two divisions out of the Causse deserters of the Red Army, there was no Osama bin Laden in existence. Russia should understand that military solutions have not been able to substitute dialogues, talks and negotiations of political solution. It would be wise not to find an alibi in bin Laden's alleged help to Chechens as the cause of Russia's predicament in Chechnya. To repeat what has existed since the last four centuries was no creation of any external factor.

When a powerful nation wants to adopt bellicose steps, its intelligence agencies manufacture "reports" and "information". CIA manufactured Gulf of Tonkin incident to manufacture excuse for US intervention in Vietnam as is now acknowledged in American books on CIA activities, like the prestigious research: "CIA, the Agency". Involving Osama in all such activities is a game that US has been playing and now Russia has joined US in the same game. His name could have been included in the accusation to create a joint US-Russia operation, if that be possible, or to seek American backing at least. One can look in the Aesop's Fables the story of the wolf and the lamb who (the latter) was accused of muddying the water while the wolf was upstream and the lamb downstream.

The solution does not lie in unleashing bombs on Afghanistan but to return to the table and implement the 1997 Chechen-Russian Cessfire Agreement and implement it, if necessary with minor modifications, but certainly not in use of force.

If Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have their problems with Afghanistan, perhaps Pakistan can help them more by arranging talks with Afghanistan than Russian missiles can help them. On the contrary the reckless step would inflame the situation rather than pacify it. Russia has no borders adjacent to Afghanistan. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have common borders with Afghanistan. If these have any problems with Afghanistan they should sort them out with Afghanistan directly. Russia should keep out of the affairs of the Central Asian Republics vis-a-vis their neighbours. They should resent any tutelage over their independence.

As regards Russia's attempts to step into USSR's shoes in Central Asia, it would be better for Russia to adjust itself to the new realities in the region. Some of these realities are that this area is bound to return to self determination in its cultural and social values. The solution of Russian problems lie in compromising with the new realities and allowing real independence to the Central Asian Republics, letting them return to their roots, native culture and history and not to act like how Moscow used to act till recently. Russia should not try to inherit Soviet Red Empire. Its

See Next Page

'Foreign interference causes damage to Afghan peace efforts'

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — The UN special envoy on Afghanistan Francisc Vendrell has said that foreign interference is still continuing in Afghanistan making the problem difficult and complicated but hoped solution to the conflict may possibly be found.

"Afghans have fed up with the war and all the groups know that the people of Afghanistan want peace, which has raised hopes for the solution of the Afghan conflict", Vendrell told the VOA in an interview.

He said the warring factions would soon realize that there is no military solution to the problems and the issue should be resolved through political means.

The UN envoy said that the countries which have interfered in Afghanistan's internal affairs, might have realized that they have not only harmed the Afghans but their own interests as well because no country has benefited from interference in Afghanistan neither in the previous century nor in the current century.

Vendrell said the talks between Taliban and their opponents in Jeddah were effective because the rival groups agreed on exchange of prisoners. However, he said, the agreement is yet to be implemented.

The accord will help create an atmosphere of trust between two sides and improve atmosphere for political dialogue if implemented.

Asked how arms supply into Afghanistan will be stopped, the UN envoy said that a formula should be devised during talks with the government concerned to convince the neighbouring countries that a stable government in Kabul, formed on the basis of a political settlement, will have friendly relations with them.

He said that the Iranian government and the United Nations have decided to set up UN office in Iran. He said the world body would soon appoint representative for Iran. He said he wants to strengthen UN presence in the region. He said the Afghan problem is difficult and complicated but hopeful solution to the conflict would be

found.

"The United Nations and the Iranian government have agreed to set up a Liaison office in Tehran, where one official will work. In this way, the UN will have links with Iranian authorities and other diplomats there", Vendrell said.

The UN envoy said that contacts and links would also be established with the Iran-based Afghan politicians. He said the UN preferred to have an office in Kabul but the same has not yet been established due to security, political and logistic problems. Instead, he added, Islamabad office is being used for the purpose.

He said that presence of office was very important in Tehran because the UN wants to have close links with the regional countries. He added that the Tehran office of the UN will concentrate on diplomatic and political affairs while the affairs of the refugees will be looked after by the UN-HCR. He said the UN will also appoint a political representative in Kabul soon.

NATION 17 MAY 2000

NATION

19 MAY 2000

Kabul now a peaceful city: UN

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR - Compare to other cities and towns of war affected Afghanistan, life in Kabul is satisfactory, which could be judged of the fact that its population has increased from 1.2 million to 1.78 million in a period of around two years.

The newly arrived people in Kabul are also included those who have recently repatriated from Iran and Pakistan. But majority of them have come to the city from northern areas.

According to the UNO weekly update that some two years back population of Kabul was 1.2 million but now it was registered 1.78 million. Quoting a survey report, it has informed that a high degree of mobility among the population. The report also confirmed that almost one-third of the families residing in the city had migrated this years. This increasing population is directly related to the focus of this : *The situation of displaced persons in Central Region, and the drought.*

It recalled that in the wake of fighting in late summer/fall 1999, central and north Afghanistan witnessed a wave of displacement about 200,000 people.

The greatest number was those who were displaced from Shamali north of Kabul most of them fled either to the Panjshir Valley (Northern Alliance territory) or to Kabul city.

In each location, there were an estimated 60,000 or more displaced persons.

The report further said that since mid-December, the displacement of tens of thousands of people from their homes in the Shamali plain, and the continuing drought in the region. UN and other assistance agencies have continued to monitor conditions and provide support for displaced families in the region.

In Kabul, regular food inputs from WFP for some 3,000 vulnerable families housed in the ex-Soviet Embassy compound have been matched by joint Un/NGO non-food distribution. In addition, UNICEF, together with NGO's have supported the provision of basic services (safe water, health care and education) and winterised the compound.

On the assumption that families would be able to return to their homes in Shamali in the spring. A joint strategy for scaling down external assistance over three to four months period has been planned in Kabul.

Originally, assistance for the displaced was intended to be for six months, and thus to be phased out by March. Therefore, food provision to displaced persons in the ex-Soviet compound is decreasing. While Action Contre L Faim simultaneously conducting nutritional assessments to ensure that the nutritional status of children and vulnerable not to deteriorate.

It further informed that while confronting the continuing humanitarian burden of displaced

ment, central region is also beginning to feel the effects of the drought. While southern Afghanistan remains the most affected area of the country. Other regions, including Kabul are facing drought.

The recently formed Drought Task Force in Kabul city is assessing the situation in both rural areas and the Kabul city. Forecasting of anticipated possible problems in Kabul city and rural areas is currently ongoing. Possible drought related fall out in Kabul city may be increased food prices (due to lower production), and a corresponding increase in food insecurity.

Another concern is possible shortage of drinking water, declining water quality, and public health problems.

Therefore, the assistance community is looking into a response, if it is necessary to address food security, drinking water and health sanitation.

In rural areas, preliminary concerns are that there may be a decline in harvest and livestock losses. Migration of people in search of wages/employment, a food and drinking water. An assessment of the situation in the rural areas has started one week ago. The assessment had been organised and planned by the Task Force in Kabul with the cooperation of UN agencies (WFP, UNCH (Habitat), FAO, PROMISO with IFRC and ICRC and with NGO's like CARE, Solidarities etc.

US should take initiative for peace in Afghanistan

NATION

15 MAY 2000

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — A former high-ranking official of State Department, Ambassador Peter Thompson has said Washington should initiate wide ranging diplomatic activities for the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan.

He was speaking at a function arranged by the Iran Research Center in Washington.

Peter Thompson, US Ambassador for Afghan resistance during the 1980s, said peace must return to Afghanistan because the Afghans have experienced great trouble as a result of the longstanding Afghan war. "Restoration of peace in Afghanistan is an international requirement", he said. He said that peace cannot return to Afghanistan unless the US initiates vast diplomatic efforts and arranges a big conference.

He said neither Pakistani nor Indian attempts to mediate the Afghan dispute can succeed. This is because the Afghans look with suspicion any initiative from abroad. They are particularly do not trust the efforts made by Islamabad, Tehran, Moscow or Riyadh.

The former US official said that Pakistan and Iranian peace efforts have failed because these countries only pursue their national interests and are rivaling each other

for their own interests. He said two things were raising his hopes that is that all the Afghan tribes and nationalities including Pukhtoons, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras or others are opposed to division of Afghanistan and are engaged in infighting for Afghanistan.

The neighbouring countries are also not interested in disintegrating Afghanistan and they know that their interest is secure in a united and sovereign and independent Afghanistan, he said. Thomson said that the regional countries know that trade routes from north to south and from west to east would open once peace is restored in Afghanistan.

He said Pakistan would mostly benefit from such a free flow of trade. He said the interests of Pakistan, Iran, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and China is in restoration of peace in Afghanistan. However, he said peace in Afghanistan is mostly linked with the stand of the US. He said the problem is that the US has not been having a particular strategy on Afghanistan even since 1992, when the Communist regime was toppled in Kabul.

He said this lack of policy is also bad for the US as well. He added Washington should not only confine to the issue of Bin Laden but should also adopt a wide covering

policy.

He said such a policy which aims at ending international terrorism in Afghanistan, checking growing narcotics production, eliminating the dangerous networks of Islamic extremists and opening of trade routes passing through Afghanistan. A policy which should help the Afghan people, who have been confronting death and destruction at the hands of the Communists and the extremists during the last twenty years, so that they may reconstruct their country.

He said the US should not suffice on expressing sympathies with the Afghan people and on the demand for forming a broad-based government, rather it should have an effective diplomatic strategy. He said the US government should adopt a policy on Afghanistan under the regional framework and it should aim at helping Pakistan to get itself out of the quagmire it has fallen in, remove tension between India and Pakistan, coordinate affairs with Iran, strengthen democracy and free market economy in Russia and Central Asian states, and counter the narcotics destabilizing the world and the region. It should also pave the ground for cooperation between China and Japan. The US should do it indirectly and through the United Nations.

US cautions Russia against attack

By Our Correspondent

WASHINGTON, May 23: The US State Department on Monday cautioned the Russian government that a military action in Afghanistan would not solve the Chechnya crisis.

The spokesman, Richard Boucher, when asked to react to reports that a Russian deputy has said that the country would consider launching air strikes against Afghanistan, said: "I think the important point about Chechnya is that there is a strong effort on our part to talk to the Russians about this, to get them to pursue some-

thing other than a military solution."

A Russian official was quoted by wire services as saying that since they found out that Taliban, in particular Osama bin Laden, were supporting the Chechen rebels, they would consider air strikes against Afghan positions.

Boucher said: "We have made clear and I think they have said they agree — that there is no real military solution there. So other military action is not going to help us get to a solution."

US extends help to Afghan drought victims

WASHINGTON, May 21: The United States announced on Friday it was contributing \$500,000 in emergency drought relief for crisis-stricken Afghanistan.

Washington, which does not recognize Afghanistan's ruling Taliban militia and has backed sanctions against them, said it was making the donation in response to a UN appeal.

"Afghanistan, already devastated by two decades of war, is suffering what may prove to be its worst drought in 30 years," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in a statement.

He said the money would be given to relief organizations for providing potable water, deepening wells and prevent water wastage.—AFP

DAWN

24 MAY 2000

DAWN

22 MAY 2000

Pickering confers with Taliban

ISLAMABAD, May 28: US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering held talks with Afghan Taliban government officials here on Saturday night, reports said on Sunday.

Deputy foreign minister Mulla Abdul Jaleel led the Taliban team in two hours of talks which touched on Afghanistan's alleged help to terrorists, drug trafficking and securing peace in the country, which is torn by civil war.

Pickering urged the Taliban to surrender Osama bin Laden the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency said.

Pickering was in Pakistan after holding talks in India.

Jaleel said that Osama had long been living in Afghanistan and the Taliban were ready to resolve the issue through negotiations. But a member of the Taliban team was quoted by the agency as saying that the US did not respond to Taliban proposals on the issue.

The agency reported that Jaleel rejected US and Russian charges that camps in Afghanistan were being used to train Chechen rebels and militants. He repeated Taliban chief Mullah Omar's offer to allow inspections if any camps were identified.

On the drug trafficking issue, Pickering was told that the

Taliban had reduced the cultivation of the opium poppy in Afghanistan by one-third but that cultivation could not be eliminated entirely unless Afghan farmers were given the means to grow alternative crops.

The Taliban were ready to negotiate peace with its Afghan opponents but said that the opposition was being manipulated from outside, Pickering was told, AIP said.—dpa

Reuters news agency said Pickering met Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Jaleel on Saturday at the residence of the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Sayed Mohammad Haqani.

Comment from US officials was not immediately available.

Pakistani officials have said bin Laden, fearing infiltration by US intelligence, has replaced his Arab bodyguards in Afghanistan with Pakistanis and Bangladeshi bodyguards.

They said bin Laden had recruited about three dozen Pakistanis and Bangladeshi bodyguards belonging to Harkatul Mujahideen, a Kashmiri Mujahideen outfit.

He made the changes after the arrest in Afghanistan last month of a Syrian and an Iraqi who said they were working for US and Israeli intelligence, officials said.

US backs Zahir Shah's peace moves

WASHINGTON, May 18: The United States said on Thursday it was weighing "concrete assistance" to a peace initiative for Afghanistan begun by the war-torn country's former king, Mohammad Zahir Shah.

The announcement came following talks in Washington this week between senior US officials and a delegation representing the "Rome Process" — the name given to the ex-monarch's effort to convene a *Loya Jirga* or grand council, a traditional Afghan meeting to resolve disputes.

The Afghan representatives met on Monday with Undersecretary of State for political affairs, Thomas Pickering, Washington's third highest-ranking diplomat, as well as Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Karl Inderfurth, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in a statement.

"Undersecretary Pickering told the delegation that we are examining ways to provide concrete assistance to their efforts," Boucher said.

Pickering also told the group that they should try to engage the Taliban, as well as the Northern Alliance, the United Nations and other interested parties as they proceed with their plans.—AFP

DAWN 29 MAY 2000

DAWN

19 MAY 2000

Pickering meets Taliban officials

ISLAMABAD (Online) US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering met Taliban officials here and urged them to extradite Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden so that he could be brought to justice.

"Under Secretary Pickering urged Taliban to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1276, which requires Taliban to hand over bin Laden to a country where he will be arrested and brought to justice", a US Embassy Spokesman told Online Special Correspondent Nasir Jaffry while confirming the meeting, which took place before Pickering's departure for Sri Lanka.

He said purpose of the meeting, which was held at the suggestion and with the assistance of the government of Pakistan, was to discuss implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1276. "During the meeting, Pickering provided more evidence in the case and urged Taliban to comply with

the UN resolution", the Spokesman said.

Refusing to use influence on Taliban for extradition of Osama bin Laden, Pakistan often said bin Laden was neither a citizen of Pakistan nor was he living on Pakistani soil. "Taliban and United States have been talking to each other in the past and therefore, they should try to resolve this problem through dialogue", Foreign Office Spokesman Ifkhar Murshed said.

Pickering told a group of reporters here Saturday it was hard for him to conceive of the fact that Pakistan's continued support for Taliban was irrelevant to the question of the possibility of Pakistan playing a very constructive role in bringing bin Laden to justice.

"We can encourage Pakistan in every conceivable way to use all of its contacts and all of its relationship with the Taliban to make it clear to them that the US considers harbouring of bin Laden as something very unfriendly to

American interests particularly when it is clearly known and fully established that he was responsible for bombings of our embassies as well as closely connected with the individuals, being tried in Jordan for seeking to cause havoc and mayhem early this year", Pickering said.

Answering a question, the Spokesman said Pickering also talked about the expanding production of narcotics in Afghanistan, Afghan peace process and human rights situation in that country. "Mr Pickering also noted with regret death of a UN field worker in Taliban's bombardment in Afghanistan on May 20, 2000", he said.

It may be recalled that during his talks with Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf and Foreign Ministry officials, Pickering discussed Afghanistan and conveyed Washington's deep concerns about continued presence of bin Laden in that country.

Senior US official met Taliban on 'Pakistan's suggestion'

ISLAMABAD, May 30: The US Embassy on Monday clarified the position about the meeting held between the Secretary of State Thomas Pickering and the Taliban officials here on Saturday.

Mr Pickering met the Taliban representatives to discuss the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution No 1257 which required them to hand over Osama bin Laden over to a country where he would be arrested and brought to justice, according to a press release.

The meeting was held at the suggestion of the government of Pakistan and with the assistance of the government of Afghanistan. It was held at the US Embassy in Islamabad.

During the meeting, the Under Secretary reviewed the evidence in the case, provided additional information and urged the Taliban to comply with the resolution.

He noted the resolution, a recent UNSC statement and the provision for further measures should the Taliban not comply.

The Under Secretary and the Taliban representatives also discussed the Afghan peace process, human rights and the increased production of narcotics and its trafficking.

Russia, Uzbekistan may provide arms to Masood

ALMATY, May 17: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov may agree on military and financial aid to Ahmad Shah Masood, the ethnic Tajik leader of an opposition alliance in northern Afghanistan now fighting the Taliban government, Russian media said on Wednesday.

Russian President is due to visit Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on Thursday and Friday and his objective will be to reassert Moscow's position in the strategic Central Asian region which was a part of former Soviet Union.

Security concerns relating to neighbouring Afghanistan are expected to top the agenda during talks between Putin, on his second trip abroad since being sworn in earlier this month, and the Uzbek leader Islam Karimov.

Putin believes there are links between the hardline Muslim movement and separatist fighters waging guerilla warfare against Russian troops in

Chechnya.

"Improved Russian-Uzbek relations are mainly due to concerns over security and the aim of strengthening the southern border of the old Soviet Union," said Andrei Grozin of the Moscow-based Institute for Integration and Diaspora.

Karimov and Putin, prime minister at the time, found common ground when they met in the Uzbek capital Tashkent in December. Both see Afghanistan as a threat to stability in the volatile, resource-rich Central Asian region and beyond.

Karimov narrowly escaped death when a series of bombs went off in Tashkent in February, 1999. He blamed the attacks on radical Islamic opponents suspected of operating from bases in Afghan territory controlled by the ruling Taliban militia.

CONTRAST: Analysts agreed Putin would prove more assertive yet diplomatic than Boris Yeltsin in a region whose leaders have been keen to distance themselves from the capri-

cious, sometimes heavy-handed, actions of Putin's predecessor.

Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov welcomed the apparent change in attitude.

"What we had five years ago, when they (Russia) forced ultimatum on us when they wanted to buy gas, will not be repeated," he said on state television on Wednesday.

The contrast in styles will be underlined by memories of Yeltsin's 1998 visit to Uzbekistan, when a stumble followed by a curtailed stay in Kazakhstan due to illness signalled for many the beginning of the end of his leadership.

In the Turkmen capital Ashgabat, Putin will discuss a deal for 50 billion cubic metres a year of gas going through Russia, though Niyazov said differences remain over pricing.

The project is seen by some as a snub to Washington, which wants Niyazov to commit natural gas to a proposed trans-Caspian pipeline to Turkey, bypassing Russia and the "rogue state" Iran.—Reuters

Kabul helping Chechens: Moscow

MOSCOW, May 19: The Russian security services on Friday warned of plans by the Taliban militia to send fighters to help Muslim rebels in Chechnya, and claimed that Saudi backers were funding Chechen-armed Taliban group in Chechnya, which adjoins Dagestan.

Some of the Chechen-led groups later proclaimed an independent Islamic state and rose up against federal forces in summer 1999. Fighting spread into Chechnya eight weeks later.

Chechen rebel forces have, according to Russian intelligence reports, been receiving funding and reinforcements of men and supplies from Afghanistan and other Arab countries throughout the conflict.

One of the leading rebel commanders, a Jordanian known as Khattab, is believed to have fought earlier in Afghanistan and to maintain a Saudi-backed millionaire Osama bin Laden.

The former president of Chechnya, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who is regarded as the funding coordinator of the rebel forces, was recently in Pakistan, and possibly also in Afghanistan.—DPA

Russia may attack Afghanistan

MOSCOW (AP) — A top Kremlin official said Monday that Afghanistan's ruling Taliban and suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden have signed an agreement to provide military aid to Chechen rebels, and he warned that Russia might launch airstrikes against Afghanistan.

Presidential spokesman on Chechnya Sergei Yastzhebmsky said Russian intelligence services have obtained proof of a support agreement between the Taliban, Chechen militants and bin Laden.

"I wouldn't rule out the possibility of preventive strikes if a real threat arises to the national interest of Russia or our allies in the region," Yastzhebmsky said at a briefing.

"It's an entirely real possibility," he said.

Strikes outside of Russia's territory would open a new chapter in the Chechen war, spreading the conflict to another volatile Islamic area.

It would also run counter to earlier Russian criticism of U.S. strikes on supposed terrorist targets around the world, including a 1998 cruise missile attack on Afghanistan.

Yastzhebmsky said President Vladimir Putin had mulled over the possibility of using air power to destroy terrorist bases in Afghanistan during a trip to Central Asia last week, and had discussed the idea with leaders of countries bordering Afghanistan.

Russia maintains military bases in the region inherited from Soviet times, and from the Soviet Union's futile, 10-year war against Afghan guerrillas in the 1980s.

Yastzhebmsky said representatives of Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov had met with Taliban officials and bin Laden about two weeks ago and signed a protocol to send 70 to 100 Islamic militants to Chechnya.

Bin Laden allegedly masterminded the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The United States later launched cruise missile attacks on suspected terrorist training camps in Afghanistan.

Russia protested this attack as breaching Afghan sovereignty.

The Taliban has recognized Chechnya's independence claim and allowed rebel representatives to open an embassy in the Afghan capital Kabul. The Taliban Foreign Ministry refused to comment on whether it would contribute arms and fighters to the Chechen independence drive.

Meanwhile, Yastzhebmsky denied reports by Russian news agencies Monday that Russian fighter jets had bombed a column of Afghan militants already on the Chechen border with Georgia.

Russian warplanes did attack and destroy a column of a dozen trucks in the key Argut Gorge, which leads through Chechnya's southern mountains to Georgia, he said.

In another development, Yastzhebmsky criticized a telephone conversation between Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and the head of the Council of Europe human rights group, Lord Russell-Johnston, calling it a collusion with terrorists.

Reading what he said was a transcript of the call, Yastzhebmsky said Maskhadov invited Russell-Johnston to visit him in Chechnya, and Russell-Johnston politely declined, saying he had to observe international law.

Russell-Johnston encouraged Maskhadov to hand over Russian prisoners of war and encouraged attempts at peace negotiations.

DAWN

23 MAY 2000

Russia may attack Afghan camps

MOSCOW, May 22: Russian President Vladimir Putin's top spokesman on Chechnya warned on Monday of airstrikes against alleged guerrilla training camps in Afghanistan.

"I would not rule that out," Sergei Yastzhebmsky told a press conference in response to

a question.

"We might possibly carry out preventive strikes if there is a threat to Russia's national interests, or a threat to the national interests of countries in the region which have friendly ties with Russia," he said.

—AFP

Moscow ready to blast Afghan camps

MOSCOW, May 24: Russia's military said on Wednesday it was ready to blitz alleged terrorist camps in Afghanistan should its political masters give the green light, as Moscow continued to rattle its sabre over aid to Chechnya.

Moscow accuses the Taliban of training guerrillas fighting its troops in Chechnya, and charges that Osama bin Laden pledged support for the guerrillas during a secret meeting this year.

Culminating a week of Moscow warnings, Interfax quoted senior defence sources as saying that Russia had mapped out contingency plans for air strikes against suspected Afghan training grounds.

The source said air raids would be delivered jointly with the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

He added that preparations for such an attack had been made during military exercises

conducted both this year and last.

"We have no plans to resort to ground troops," the source said.

The warning came against the backdrop of a new collective security agreement being worked out by Russia and five other former Soviet republics in the Belarus capital, Minsk.

"In this situation, we must stress our readiness to take decisive actions against bandits," Russian Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev said in Minsk.

The Taliban swiftly condemned the Kremlin's threat and vowed to retaliate if attacked.

Gathering consensus among its allies for a potential strike, Moscow urged leaders of other former Soviet states to take a tough stand against "Muslim fundamentalism", which Russian Security Council chief Igor Ivanov labelled as one of the most serious threats facing Central Asia.—AFP

DAWN

25 MAY 2000

23 MAY 2000 NATION

Kremlin defiant about threat of air strikes on Afghanistan

MOSCOW (AFP) - A top Presidential aide refused to back down on Tuesday over his warning that Moscow could strike Chechen guerrilla training camps in Afghanistan, despite sharp criticism from opposition deputies.

President Vladimir Putin's top spokesman on Chechnya, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, repeated that Moscow did not rule out attacking suspected Islamic 'terrorist' bases in Afghanistan if they threatened Russian security or that of the region.

'We don't need to have armed intervention' against the ruling Taliban religious militia in Afghanistan, Yastrzhembsky said, adding that Russia could use 'technical means' — apparently referring to air or missile strikes.

But the threat issued in a press conference on Monday provoked alarm in opposition circles in Russia, amid fears that the eight-month-old conflict in breakaway Chechnya could widen. The warning was 'clearly hasty,' said the Communist speaker of the State Duma lower house of Parliament, Gennady Seleznyov, who holds the fourth highest public office in the country.

Yastrzhembsky was 'only expressing his point of view,' said Seleznyov, according to Interfax news agency.

Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov branded the Kremlin official's comments as 'completely irresponsible.'

'I am increasingly convinced that the Kremlin has been infiltrated by people who are prepared to wage war against everyone. Against their own people. Against neighbouring states,' he said.

A leading member of the liberal opposition Yabloko party for his

part urged the government to exercise prudence.

'The United States carried out strikes against Afghanistan and Sudan and the international community did not condemn them,' said Alexei Arbatov, who is also deputy head of the Duma defence committee.

'Russia has the right to act in the same way but it should not forget

that this could lead to an upsurge in terrorism in Russia,' he said.

The opposition Svobodnyaya newspaper warned that 'for Russia, a second Afghan war would be tantamount to suicide,' a reference to the Soviet Union's unhappy 1979-89 military intervention in the mountainous state.

But Yastrzhembsky reminded his critics that the new Russian security

doctrine allowed Moscow to use all forces at its disposal — including nuclear weapons — as a last resort against armed aggression.

In Kabul, an Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman Faiz Ahmad Faiz condemned the warning, but vowed that the Taliban would continue to extend 'moral backing' for the Chechen rebels.

Moscow accuses the Taliban of supplying men and weapons to the guerrillas in Chechnya, where Russia has been waging a massive military crackdown since October 1.

It also points the finger at Osama bin Laden, top of Washington's most wanted list of international terrorists, who has been living in Afghanistan for several years.

The wealthy Saudi dissident is blamed by Washington for the 1998 twin bombings of US embassies in East Africa in which more than 220 people were killed, which prompted US missile strikes on Afghanistan 11 days later.

But Yastrzhembsky won support from another Kremlin aide, General Viktor Kazantsev, who until recently led the military campaign in Chechnya and has now been appointed Putin's special envoy to the North Caucasus region.

'Why not?' he replied, when asked if Russia should consider attacking training camps in Taliban-held Afghanistan.

Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov for his part side-stepped the issue when quizzed by journalists.

Meanwhile, the Russian army reported it had killed two rebels overnight in a clash in southern Chechnya, and said a prominent Chechen guerrilla commander, Abu Mowsayev, had been killed in a special operation.

Pickering met Taliban at Pak suggestion: US

ISLAMABAD (USIS) - The US Embassy Tuesday issued a statement regarding a meeting with the Taliban in Islamabad. On May 27, visiting US Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering held a meeting in Islamabad with Taliban representatives to discuss implementation of UNSCR 1267 which requires them to hand Usman bin Laden over to a country where he will be arrested and brought to justice. This meeting was held at the suggestion, and with the assistance, of the Government of Pakistan in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Online adds: Pakistan Tuesday said it took no part in on-going process of dialogue between Taliban and United States but had always been ready to be helpful to both the sides.

'We take no part in the process of talks but have always been ready to facilitate the two sides', Foreign Office Spokesman Iftikhar Mursheed said while talking to the agency.

He was asked to comment on US

Embassy Spokesman's remarks that meeting between Taliban officials and US Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering was held at the suggestion and with the assistance of the government of Pakistan.

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering had met Taliban officials here before leaving for Sri Lanka and urged them to extradite Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden so that he could be brought to justice. He urged Taliban to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 1276, which requires Taliban to hand over bin Laden to a country where he will be arrested and brought to justice.

'We have constantly advised Taliban and United States to talk directly on bin Laden issue as he is neither our citizen nor is he living on Pakistani soil,' Mursheed reiterated.

He said on Pakistan's advice, Taliban and US had been talking to each other directly for last one year.

Asked if Pakistani officials also attended the meeting to facilitate the two sides, he recalled that Pakistan had always expressed readiness to be helpful in promoting direct contact between Taliban and United States.

NATION

24 MAY 2000

DAWN

31 MAY 2000

NATION

25 MAY 2000

Russia draws up plans to hit Afghanistan

MOSCOW (AFP) - Russia has drawn up contingency plans for air strikes against suspected 'terrorist bases' in Afghanistan, senior defence sources said Wednesday, as Moscow continued to rattle its sabre over aid to Chechnya.

Interfax news agency quoted senior defence sources as saying said that Russia's attack would be delivered jointly with the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The source added that preparations for such a raid had already been made during military exer-

cises conducted both this year and last. 'If a political decision is taken, strikes will follow immediately,' the source said, adding: 'We have no plans to resort to ground troops.'

The report culminated a week of Moscow warnings against Taliban.

It also came against the backdrop of a new collective security agreement being worked out by Russia and six other former Soviet republics in the Belarus capital, Minsk. 'In this situation, we must stress our readiness to take decisive actions against bandits,' Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev said

in televised remarks from Minsk. Ilya Klebanov, a deputy Prime Minister in charge of the defence sector, for his part confirmed that 'from the military-technical point of view, Russia is prepared for anything.' The Kremlin accuses the Taliban of assisting fighters waging an eight-month battle against Russian troops in Chechnya, notably through the sale of Stinger missiles used by Mujahideen to down several Russian aircraft.

It also suspects Osama bin Laden of pledging his support for the Chechens — viewed as terrorists by Moscow — during a secret meeting this year. Moscow, meanwhile, urged leaders of other former Soviet states to take a tough stand against Muslim extremism, which Russian Security Council chairman Igor Ivanov labeled as one of the most serious threats now facing Central Asia.

In Moscow, the prospects of air strikes were condemned by Russia's Communist opposition but earned lukewarm support from most other groupings in parliament.

Russian defence ministry sources Wednesday told Interfax news agency that no ground invasion of Afghanistan was planned and that only air and rocket forces would be used to attack suspected terrorist training camps.

Taliban vow to counter Russian airstrikes

KABUL (AFP) Afghanistan's ruling Taliban warned Wednesday it would reciprocate to the best of its capacity if Moscow carried out airstrikes against its territory.

Any strikes would entail dangerous consequences for Moscow, senior Taliban spokesman Abdul Hai Mutmaen said. 'We will use all our existing resources against the enemy. We will react to the best of our ability,' he said.

The practical reaction of the Islamic Emirate will be like how

the Afghans reacted to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, he said. 'Afghans would get united again to defeat any Russian adventure,' the spokesman said.

The Taliban will hold responsible those countries which aid Russia in carrying out the threatened attacks, Mutmaen said, referring to neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

'The Islamic Emirate will hold responsible those (countries) from where the aggression is launched,' Mutmaen said.

Kazakhstan
opposes
attack on
Afghanistan

ALMATY, May 25: Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Monday he did not believe in the need for Russian military strikes against the Taliban.

Senior Russian officials, including Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev, have spoken of possibly launching strikes against Taliban, attacks of 'preventive' training, which Russia accuses Chechens of carrying out. 'I do not think this needs to be done. I do not think the need for the strikes is necessary at the moment,' Mr. Nazarbayev said in remarks aired by state televi-

sion. Mr. Nazarbayev said he shared Russia's perception that instability in the Central Asian region also posed a threat to its own security.

'Russia has said that destabilisation in Central Asia threatens its own stability. This is more important than any of these remarks; that we are hearing every day that we will keep hearing in future,' he said. —Reuters

DAWN
30 MAY 2000

'OIC can mediate between Afghans'

ISLAMABAD (APP) - Secretary General of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) Ibrahim Bakr has said that all factions in Afghanistan trust OIC and the conference can effectively mediate between them.

Talking to Voice of America he said, the Afghan conflict is a long standing and gulf between the two sides is very deep. That is why the crisis could not be resolved within days.

The OIC he said is trying to secure ceasefire and mitigate sufferings of the people of Afghanistan.

He said, the human rights issues such as exchange of prisoners, repatriation of internally displaced persons, halt to foreign interference and smooth supply of aid to the displaced persons in areas controlled by the two sides were discussed on the first day.

The agreements on these issues are likely to be secured, he added.

He said, presently there is no progress on political issues as the two sides are unwilling to budge from their basic positions. But OIC is hopeful to find out some solution on these issues which will be discussed in the upcoming sittings.

Meanwhile the Taliban delegation's chief Ameer Khan Muttaqi said the exchange of prisoners un-

der the OIC arrangements is a positive step and it will pave way for solution of problems.

He said the issue of foreign interference was raised by the OIC during the meeting but the Taliban's delegation stressed that talks should be held on the points which are key to solution of problems.

"We demanded that foreign interference should end. We will discuss the issue of foreign interference in the later stages", Muttaqi said.

Asked as to why foreign interference was not stopped, Muttaqi said, this should be determined as to who gets support from abroad and who are supported by the Af. ghan nation.

"We said the Afghan problem will not remain even for one month if arms and ammunition is not supplied from abroad", he claimed.

Head of the United Front delegation, Dr. Abdullah expressed the hope that Jeddah talks would deliver the good.

He admitted that Taliban have control over vast areas but they have many problems as well. The United Front wanted that all problems should be discussed.

He said UF wanted solution of the problem, be that through formation of Shooras, Loya Jirga or elections.

AI deplors Russian threats to Taliban

MOSCOW, May 27: Amnesty International is concerned that there will an escalation of the war in Afghanistan following Moscow's threats to bomb alleged terrorist camps, the London-based human rights organization said in a communique released here on Saturday.

Moscow accuses the Taliban of training guerrillas fighting Russian troops in Chechnya.

Amnesty said it was "concerned there will be a further escalation of war in

Afghanistan, resulting in more human rights violations following this week's warning from Russia's Defence Minister (Igor Sergeyev) and other senior officials that Russia will resort to aerial bombing of Afghanistan to crush suspected Chechen armed opposition training camps".

It said the warning evoked memories of "massive human rights violations during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989.—APP

AI concerned about Russian threats

International is concerned that there will an escalation of the war in Afghanistan following Moscow's threats to bomb suspected terrorist camps, the London-based human rights organization said in a communique released here Saturday.

Moscow accuses Afghanistan's Islamic government, the Taliban, of training guerrillas fighting Russian federal troops in separatist Chechnya.

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war in Afghanistan resulting in more human rights violations following this week's warning from Russia's Defence Minister (Igor Sergeyev) and other senior officials that Russia will resort to aerial bombing of Afghanistan to crush suspected Chechen armed opposition training camps."

It said the warning evoked memories of "massive human rights violations during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 which resulted in the death of thousands of defenceless women, men and chil-

The Russian

"Commonwealth" cannot be "Empire". It would be useful for the USA also to understand it. This does not mean that no co-existence is possible. Cultural coexistence is part of global harmony, but that will come through readjustments not through subjugation by force.

Anyone who had a course of Russian diplomatic history in the university, would be aware of Russia's typical attitude towards Muslim areas over which it had its expansionist designs over the centuries. It is not a new development. Russia cannot wish away Afghanistan or quarantine it. Cultural links transcend boundaries. As is known to any diplomatic negotiator, Russians are inclined to be hard headed and have a tendency to resolve issues through force. After the dismantling of the Soviet Union they are trying to revive the Red Empire through various devices, like the theory of "near abroad" and the Commonwealth. This approach is meant to deny independence to the Central Asian Republics. In this attempt the Russians are wary of assertion of Central Asian personality which they want to redesign. History of Central Asia is in the glorious past of Tashkent, Samarkand, Kheva, Bukhara, etc, and not in Moscow and Moskovy Principality. The history of Moscow and Moskovy pales into insignificance before the glory of these centres of culture. It would be recalled that on ending the Soviet Union, Russian Federation revived the Greek Orthodox Church and the Czarist Russia's national emblems, and colors in the flag.

One is tempted to ask from where Russia has acquired the right to issue "warnings" to sovereign states, far away from its borders. Russia would find it difficult to answer with reference to international law or the UN Charter. It is difficult to believe that any power can be so reckless as to think in terms of committing such a blatant aggression on a sovereign member country of the UN. Whatever reservation one can have on who represents that sovereign member state, Afghanistan is an original member state of the UN. One can see that after NATO's attacks on Yugoslavia and showering of American cruise missiles on Afghanistan in 1998, a dangerous trend is taking shape, not for self defence, but for use of force by major or pseudo major powers to achieve their power politics objectives.

It must not be forgotten that twenty years ago, there was no (what Americans and their grouping have started to call) "terrorism". They should pause to think what has caused this development. What was the "S" (

stimulus) in the language of Pavlov, the behaviorist psychologist - a Russian by origin - to which has come this "R" or response. The mount Vasuvius burst after so many humiliations were inflicted on Muslims culminating in the graphic scenes of NATO bombing of Baghdad and Basra, in the Gulf War ostensibly launched for retrieving Kuwait from Iraqi aggression and occupation but resulted in something much beyond. Anyone who denies that on this issue the masses and the establishments in Muslim world were divided sharply should look at the press of that time. Thereafter started the wave of violent reactions. It was USA which had blessed the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Has Churchill not said "In victory magnanimity, in defeat defiance." The implications of this political aphorism should be clear to any experienced diplomat.

The Afghan delegation

A host of bilateral issues will feature in the discussions starting today between the visiting Afghan delegation headed by the country's Interior Minister, Mullah Abdus Razzak Akhund and the Pakistani counterparts led by the Interior Minister, General Moynuddin Haider. The agenda for such meetings is predetermined by many unresolved problems, and predictably the Afghan refugees, smuggling, the Afghan Transit Trade, and terrorism will feature in the discussions. The fact that the topic of Pakistanis involved in sectarian crimes taking refuge in Afghanistan, has already come up for discussion with the Press at the airport reception and a sharp denial promptly issued by the Afghan minister, does point to the hot issue on the agenda. Hopefully, when this issue will resurface in the seclusion of bilateral discussions, a rational approach backed by factual evidence and motivated by a far-sighted policy will prevail. It could possibly be taken up as part of the larger issue of training camps set up in Afghanistan by certain sectarian groups. Coming as it does, so close to the recent incidents of sectarian terrorism, the meeting cannot afford to ignore the issue or its ramifications for Pak-Afghan relations. It may also serve as a point of reference on whether Kabul and Islamabad want to contribute to the western stereotypes about the two countries. However, the limitations of territorial jurisdiction in Afghanistan that the Taliban government may have, can be discussed with the honesty that should exist between two brothers.

The lingering issue of Afghan refugees will remain on the agenda for some years to come. According to the UN sponsored Phased Repatriation Programme for Afghan Refugees started this March, which envisages the return of 100,000 refugees annually, the process could take about 16 years, working on the conservative figure of about 1.6 million Afghan refugees. That timeframe too, would be largely dependent on the socio-economic conditions prevailing in Afghanistan. Any upset could slow down the process or even reverse it. The Islamabad dialogue is a good opportunity to persuade the Taliban government to adopt the friendly policies that the refugees seek and enumerate the economic benefits of the repatriation process. Concerns on smuggling, will also require attention but in the larger context of the mobile refugee population and the misuse of the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement. Although there has been talk of downsizing this trade, more work and coordination is needed to eliminate the areas in this Agreement which are purely a cover for a smuggling operation. In fact, the two teams have a plate full of issues to discuss but much would depend on the art of dialogue.

DAWN 15 MAY 2000

Libya offers help for Afghan peace

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 14: Libya on Sunday offered its role in bringing peace to Afghanistan and also showed willingness to contribute to reconstruction of the war-torn country.

The offer was given to the government of Pakistan by the visiting Libyan foreign minister, who called on the chief executive General Pervez Musharraf here.

Expressing Tripoli's concern and sympathy over the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan, according to an official press release, the foreign minister expressed "his country's readiness to contribute to the restoration of peace in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of the war-devastated coun-

try."

The foreign minister Abdul Rahman Mohammed Shalqum also lent Tripoli's support to Islamabad's effort to resume peace talks with New Delhi and hoped that both India and Pakistan would be able to resolve Kashmir dispute on the basis of the UN resolutions.

Conveying greetings from Col Moamer Al Qadhafi, Mr Shalqum told Gen Musharraf that the Libyan leader attached great importance to Libya's historic relations with Pakistan.

He said that the CE's recent visit to Libya had reinvigorated bilateral relationship between the two fraternal countries. He

said that he was visiting Pakistan to carry forward the momentum and concretize bilateral cooperation, particularly in economic fields.

Reciprocating greetings from Col Qadhafi, Gen Musharraf said that he was deeply touched by the warm welcome extended to him during his recent visit to Libya.

The CE appreciated prompt follow-up by the way of Libyan foreign minister's visit to Pakistan to further strengthen the bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

He said that both the countries need to make concerted efforts to add greater economic substance to their relationship.

Libya asks Taliban to expel its nationals

ISLAMABAD, May 13: Libya on Friday asked Taliban to expel its citizens who had taken part in Jihad against the Soviet forces and had been living in Afghanistan since.

Libyan Foreign Minister Abdul Rehman Mohammad Shalqum made the call when he met Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister Mullah Abdul Jalil here, sources said.

The Taliban leader turned down the demand. He told the Libyan minister that they did not allow any foreigner to operate against any country.

There were several Libyan nationals living in Afghanistan with other Arab nationals who had waged Jihad against the defunct USSR Red Army.

Some Arab countries also urged Taliban to close down the so-called training camps in Afghanistan. The Taliban denied involvement of Arab nationals in terrorist activities and insisted that they were living as guests and refugees.

It was the second contact between Libya and the Taliban in less than three months. Afghan Foreign Secretary Abdul Rahman Zahid met senior Libyan officials in Germany in February.

The Libyan minister showed his country's readiness to extend financial support to Afghanistan, especially for the drought-hit people. Mr Shalqum told the Taliban leader that a Libyan delegation will be sent to Afghanistan to explore ways for assistance in educational and health sectors.

AFGHAN INTERIOR MINISTER: Afghan Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razaq will arrive in Islamabad on Sunday for talks with Pakistan officials on many issues, focusing on terrorism, officials said on Saturday.

Mullah Abdul Razaq will hold talks with Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider and senior officials. He was scheduled to arrive here on Monday, but now he was coming a day earlier.

—NNI/APP

DAWN 14 MAY 2000

Iranian parliament okays sealing of Afghan border

DAWN

18 MAY 2009

TEHRAN, May 17: Iran's parliament voted on Wednesday to seal the country's 940kms border with Afghanistan in a bid to contain drug smuggling.

Parliament agreed to give a special budget to the interior ministry to build electronically-equipped walls and fences to keep out smugglers and bandits.

Deputies said the measures were essential to save the border province of Khorassan from drugs and criminal activity.

The vote came as officials in Kabul said Iran had promised to help the ruling Taliban, whose regime Tehran does not recognize, curb opium production and drug trafficking.

Mir Najibullah Shams, secretary general of the Taliban's anti-drug commission, said Iran would give aid to poppy-growers in the southern Afghan province of Helmand to cultivate alternative crops.

Helmand, on the Iranian border, is the largest opium-producing province in Afghanistan, which itself emerged last year as the world's biggest grower of the

drug with a record yield of 4,600 tons.

Shams said the Taliban would step up its anti-drug campaign if the world community and its neighbours helped modernize border control facilities.

Iran is a transit route for smugglers bringing drugs out of Pakistan and Afghanistan and into the Gulf, Europe and Central Asia. Iran, which seizes more than 200 tonnes of opium or its derivatives every year, says most of the drugs are destined for the western European market.

Anyone arrested in Iran with more than five kilograms (11 pounds) of opium or more than 30 grams of heroin faces the death penalty.

In 1999, 740 drug smugglers and 174 Iranian policemen were killed in armed clashes in the frontier areas, according to official figures published in January.

FUND: Iran's parliament approved on Wednesday emergency funds of about \$25 million to help stem the growing flow of drugs from Afghanistan.

The assembly rushed through the bill to help security forces

who are waging a battle against armed drug traffickers.

The funds, which need final approval from a top state body, are to create new barriers along the border with Afghanistan and to upgrade equipment.

Officials say Iranian forces are poorly equipped to face the traffickers' advanced weaponry.

ESPIONAGE TRIAL: Eight Iranian Muslims accused with 13 Jews currently on trial for spying for Israel have been summoned to appear before the revolutionary court in Shiraz, court spokesman court spokesman Hossein-Ali Amiri said on Wednesday.

"The Muslims and Jews who are free have been summoned. They must appear within three days of receiving their summons to the revolutionary court, or arrest warrants will be issued for them," Amiri told a news conference.

Amiri said the trial was set to start again next Wednesday "but that if the people summoned appeared before then, it could start earlier."

Ten Jews who had been held

in custody since their arrest last year have already appeared before the court, and all but two have confessed to the charges against them.

The other three, along with the Muslims, are out on bail. Iranian officials had said the Muslims, who have not been identified, would be tried separately.

Since the start of the trial, the defence has vigorously argued for the Muslims, as the alleged providers of intelligence to the Jews, to give evidence.

The only accused who appeared at the seventh hearing on Wednesday, Javid Bentyaghoub, a 30-year-old shoe salesman from Shiraz, rejected accusations that he belonged to a spy ring, saying it was a religious group, lawyer Karim Sadeqi said.

However, Amiri stated that he had now admitted spying, but unknowingly.

"Bentyaghoub gathered information on the drinking water network that his group wanted to pollute to cause problems," Amiri claimed.—AFP

Drug smuggling

Iran may

close

DAWN

17 MAY 2009

Afghanistan border

TEHRAN, May 16: Iran's outgoing parliament is to debate on Wednesday a bill to seal the country's 940km border with Afghanistan in a bid to contain drug smuggling.

The conservative-dominated parliament voted on Tuesday to discuss the measure as a matter of urgency — two days after a strong attack by an MP from a border region on an interior minister. Akbar Valad Mussavi-Lari for the Islamic Consultative Assembly.

"Every day our children, our women and our men are shot dead, taken hostage or forced by Afghan bandits and drug traffickers," shouted Ebrahimyay Salami, who represents Khvat and Reshtekhar in the frontier area.

He spoke of a "reign of terror" instigated by hundreds of armed smugglers and bandits in the area.

Mr. Mussavi-Lari, who came to parliament to answer Mr Salami, admitted the level of insecurity prevailing in the "high risk" areas, and assured MPs that the government and police were determined to fight the drug smugglers.

"Last year we arrested 9,177 people in those areas," he said, but did not elaborate on the charges against them or give their nationalities.

DRAFT BILL: Iran is allocating over \$116 million to boost security along its eastern borders with Afghanistan, the official IRNA news agency reported.

Iran accuses Afghanistan of producing more than 3,000 tons of narcotics every year of which 2,000 tons are smuggled into Iran for the Iranian and Afghan markets. The Iranian police can only seize at the most 10 per cent of the drugs.

Out of the total 158,000 prisoners in Iran, more than 60 per cent are serving sentences on drug-related charges and are segregated from other inmates.

According to press reports, there are currently more than three million drug users in Iran, including 260,000 students. A large number of marriages reportedly up to 90 per cent in border provinces with Afghanistan — lead to divorces due to addiction of the male spouses.—Agencies

Iranian Parliament votes border fence with Afghanistan

TEHRAN (AFP) - Iran's Parliament voted Wednesday to seal the country's 940 kilometre (600-mile) border with Afghanistan in a bid to contain drug smuggling.

The conservative-dominated Parliament agreed to give a special budget to the interior ministry to build electronically-equipped walls and fences to keep out smugglers and bandits.

Deputies said the measures were essential to save the border province of Khorassan from drugs and criminal activity.

On Sunday an MP from a border region made a violent attack on Interior Minister Abdolvahed Mussavi-Lari for the lack of security.

'Every day our children, our women and our men are shot dead, taken hostage or raped by Afghan bandits and drug traffickers,' shouted Ebrahimy Salami, who represents Khaf and Reshtekhar in the frontier area.

He spoke of a 'reign of terror' instigated by hundreds of armed smugglers and bandits in the area. Mussavi-Lari admitted the level of insecurity prevailing in the 'high

risk' areas, and assured MPs that the government and police were 'determined' to fight the drug smugglers.

Wednesday's vote came as officials in Kabul said Iran had promised to help the ruling Taliban, whose regime Tehran does not recognise, curb opium production and drug trafficking.

Mir Najibullah Shams, secretary general of the Taliban's anti-drug commission, told AFP Tuesday that Iran would give aid to poppy-growers in the southern Afghan province of Helmand to cultivate alternative crops.

Helmand, on the Iranian border, is the largest opium-producing province in Afghanistan, which itself emerged last year as the world's biggest grower of the drug with a record yield of 4,600 tons.

According to Shams, Iran pledged the support when a Taliban delegation visited the Iranian border city of Mashhad recently.

'The authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran realized the technical and economic problems of the Islamic Emirate (Taliban) and

expressed readiness to give assistance in curbing drug-trafficking along common borders,' Shams said.

Shams, who accompanied the Afghan team, said the Taliban would step up its anti-drug campaign if the world community and its neighbours helped modernise border control facilities.

Iran is a transit route for smugglers bringing drugs out of Pakistan and Afghanistan and into the Gulf, Europe and Central Asia. Iran, which seizes more than 200 tonnes of opium or its derivatives every year, says most of the drugs are destined for the western European market.

Anyone arrested in Iran with more than five kilograms (11 pounds) of opium or more than 30 grams of heroin faces the death penalty.

In 1999, 740 drug smugglers and 174 Iranian policemen were killed in armed clashes in the frontier areas, according to official figures published in January.

Iran's efforts to combat the drugs trade have been praised by the international community.

Iranian Parliament seeks to close border with Afghanistan

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He spoke of a 'reign of terror' instigated by hundreds of armed smugglers and bandits in the area.

Mussavi-Lari, who came to Parliament to answer Salami, admitted the level of insecurity prevailing in the 'high risk' areas, and assured MPs that the government and police were 'determined' to fight the drug smugglers.

'Last year we arrested 9,177

people in these areas,' he said, but did not elaborate on the charges against them or give their nationalities.

Iran is a transit route for smugglers bringing drugs out of Pakistan and Afghanistan and into the Gulf, Europe and Central Asia. Iran, which seizes more than 200 tonnes of opium or its derivatives every year, says most of the drugs are destined for the western European market.

It accuses the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which it does not recognise, of encouraging the trade, though the Afghan Islamic Press reported at the end of April that officials of both sides had discussed cooperating to beat the traffic.

Anyone arrested in Iran with more than five kilograms (11 pounds) of opium or more than 30 grams of heroin faces the death penalty.

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Iran's efforts to combat the drugs trade have been praised by the international community.

Iranian anti-drug team to visit Kabul next week

KABUL (AFP) - An Iranian delegation will travel to Afghanistan next week for talks with the ruling Taliban authorities on curbing poppy cultivation in the opium-rich southern provinces, officials said Sunday.

Mir Najibullah Shams, secretary general of the Taliban's anti-drug commission, said the Iranian narcotics experts, expected on Monday or Tuesday, would visit Helmand and Kandahar provinces.

Helmand, on the Iranian border, is the largest poppy growing region in the war-ravaged country which has emerged as the world's largest opium producer with a record production of 4,600 tons last year.

The four-day visit was agreed upon when a Taliban delegation headed by Abdul Hamid Akhondzada, chairman of the anti-drug commission, visited the Iranian border city of Mashhad recently, Shams said.

DAWN

09 MAY 2000

Afghan goods to be shortlisted

By Ahmad Hassan

PESHAWAR, May 8: Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed on another negative list of items under Afghan Transit Trade Agreement to curb their smuggling into Pakistan.

The Frontier Governor, Mohammed Shafiq, and Afghan Consul General in Peshawar, Maulvi Najibullah at a meeting here on Monday discussed in detail a list of such items which have no consumption in Afghanistan and could be deleted from the ATTA list in order to discourage their smuggling into Pakistan.

The Afghan diplomat also assured the governor of his country's support in its drive against smuggling.

However, sources said, the Afghan diplomat informed the governor of his government's concern at the situation arising out of the government's intention of imposing GST and customs duty on foreign goods.

More than 50 per cent of the foreign goods' dealers were Afghan refugees, they said.

They added that the diplomat also discussed the matter of Afghan refugees languishing in local jails on petty offences.

The matter came under discussion on the initiative of the home department which had expressed its concern over the extra spending on these Afghan detainees.

Both sides agreed to resolve the issue on

humanitarian grounds in order to free those who have good record, they said.

They added that the issue of Saudi millionaire, Osama Bin Laden, also came under discussion as the Afghan diplomat informed the governor of his government's latest stance.

Both sides also agreed that another round of talks may be held on interior ministers level and a date for Afghan minister's visit to Islamabad may be mutually decided later.

They also discussed the issue of terrorism and expressed their desire to initiate joint efforts in eradication of the menace from their soils.

JUI chief warns US against attack on Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (Online) — Maulana Fazlur Rahman, Chief of JUI has alleged that the US Federal Bureau of Investigation personnel have been provided bases in Pakistan, and that they are trying to muster support from the tribal areas for a possible attack of Afghanistan.

In an exclusive interview with this agency here, the religious leader, however, opined that the Osama issue could not be solved through use of power, and warned that if the Saudi dissident were eliminated, nobody would be able to stop his followers—whom Osama was holding at bay—from waging a deadly war against America.

The US administration should keep in mind that any provocative move on their part could unleash a lot of problems for them, he warned.

He criticized the US policy and said that they were violating all international norms and ethics to pressurise the people of the region, and said such policies would not benefit them in the long term. The US government should review its policies towards Muslims and it is the only way to revive the trust of the people of the region, he main-

tained.

He alleged that the military government had started to take measures for changing the Kashmir policy and the process had been initiated to wind up the indigenous movement in held Kashmir. The tone of APHC is changing and even the official media of Pakistan is broadcasting the explanations and clarifications to make APHC stance look consistent, he remarked.

The suggestion to initiate tripartite dialogue is a conspiracy against the Kashmir cause in which the issue of third option will also come, he said, adding that the people of Pakistan will never let the sacrifices of brothers in Indian Held Kashmir go vain.

He affirmed that the religious parties would not withdraw the strike call of May 19 against the procedural changes in blasphemy law, and alleged that the government had showed its intentions by hiring some so-called ulama to swindle the people. The religious parties demand to make Islamic Articles of the Constitution to the part of provisional constitution order unless the Islamic identity will also remain suspended, he

maintained.

The government is confused over the proposed procedural changes in blasphemy law but our demands are clear, he remarked and added, the religious parties will go ahead on strike call at every cost and will compel the government to withdraw the changes in blasphemy law.

The JUI chief said that the government had started blackmailing in the name of accountability process, as it was not transparent and fair as government claimed. The NAB Prosecutor General Farooq Adam had been earlier convicted on criminal charges, and was now holding an important position in this process, he alleged.

He said the Supreme Court decision to validate the army takeover has cleared all the confusions and now the serious political forces should sit together to find ways to resolve the crisis. The Grand Democratic Alliance has not contacted the JUI party but if they agree to start joint struggle for the restoration of Islamic Articles of the Constitution and restoration of democratic process in the country, the JUI will consider to join the GDA, he added.

Pakistan-Afghan border trade to resume this week

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD — Trade across Pak-Afghan border is likely to resume this week as the officials of the Commerce Ministry are anticipating an agreement to reactivate the currently defunct Afghan Transit Trade Agreement.

A 10-member Afghan delegation, including Dy Commerce Minister Faiz Muhammad Faizan, headed by Afghan Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razzaq Akhund, held an inconclusive meeting with the Commerce Minister Razaq Dawood on Tuesday.

The talks may continue tomorrow or the day after tomorrow as the Afghan delegation has asked for time to consult their high command, an official of the Commerce Ministry said.

However, within this week an agreement is likely to be achieved between the two governments to restore border trade, the official said.

So far, he said both sides have agreed to take necessary steps to add greater economic substance to their relations.

The Pak-Afghan border was sealed under the Government of

Pakistan's drive to check smuggling under the guise of the Afghan transit trade.

Afghanistan, being a landlocked country, avails in normal conditions transit facility through Pakistan under the ATT Agreement which was signed in March 1965.

Commerce Minister Razaq Dawood observed during the meeting that Pakistan attached great importance to its historic relations with Afghanistan.

There exists enormous potential for economic cooperation in many areas, he maintained.

Dawood said during the meeting: "We look forward to the Afghan Government for its cooperation in our drive against smuggling."

Pakistan, he said, was keen to help its Afghan brethren with the reconstruction of their war-torn country and revival of the Afghan economy.

According to officials, the talks covered the entire range of bilateral trade and commercial matters, as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Moin meets Afghan minister

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, May 15: Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider said on Monday that Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoy brotherly relations which will continue to prosper and grow with the passage of time.

He said this when he paid a courtesy call on visiting Afghan Interior Minister Mulla Abdul Razzaq Akhund here, a press release said.

Both the sides discussed matters of mutual interest and bilateral relations. They will hold formal talks on Tuesday, during which issues concerning the Afghan transit trade and return of Afghan refugees to their homeland would be discussed.

Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan Aziz Ahmed Khan and Afghan ambassador to Pakistan Mohammad Haqqani were also present.

DAWN

16 MAY 2000

NATION 17 MAY 2000

Govt to provide fugitives list to Afghan Minister

By Rana Qaisar

ISLAMABAD - The government has prepared a list of the Pakistanis, who after committing terrorist activities and sectarian violence, have taken refuge in Afghanistan.

"We have collected information about the Pakistanis who have taken shelter in Afghanistan. These people are involved in criminal activities, especially terrorism and sectarian violence," a senior official told *The Nation* on Monday.

He said the government would provide to the Afghan Interior Minister the information and a list of those who have taken shelter in his country after committing crimes here. "We will ask the Afghan Interior Minister to extradite these people to Pakistan."

The government has also collected sufficient information about the camps in Afghanistan where the Pakistanis, involved in terrorist activities and sectarian violence, get training.

As talks between Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider and Afghan Interior Minister Mulla Ab-

NATION

16 MAY 2000

dur Razaq Akhund open here today, a wide range of issues affecting both the countries will come under discussion.

"The extradition of criminals who have taken shelter in Afghanistan, repatriation of Afghan refugees, Afghan transit trade, smuggling and terrorism are the issues to figure in during the meeting between the two Interior Ministers," the official said.

However, the Afghan Interior Minister, who is heading an eight-member delegation during his five-day official visit to Pakistan, on his arrival here had dismissed the reports as more propaganda that Pakistani criminals had taken shelter in his country.

"We will ask the Afghan authorities to extradite the Pakistanis involved in criminal activities. We will seek Afghan Minister's help that those Pakistanis who commit crimes here do not take shelter in Afghanistan," the official said.

Interior Minister Moinuddin

Haider has already said at a recent Press conference that he will take up the issue of alleged terrorist camps on Afghan soil. He also plans to visit Afghanistan after the Afghan Minister's visit to discuss terrorism.

Besides, the issues related to terrorism, repatriation of Afghan refugees and Afghan transit trade are the important issues which will be focussed upon during the meeting. The two sides will hold two rounds of talks—today and tomorrow.

There are still some 1.6 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. A UN-sponsored phase-wise repatriation of Afghan refugees had started in March this year. Some 100,000 refugees would be repatriated under the UN programme every year.

Meanwhile, the visiting Afghan minister called on Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider on Monday, stayed with him for some time and discussed matters pertaining to mutual interest and bilateral relations.

Kabul to be told to accept ceasefire: CE

ASHKABAD, May 16: Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf said on Tuesday that the Northern Alliance and the Afghan government should first accept ceasefire and then embark on some formula for the resolution of the Afghanistan problem.

He was addressing a joint press conference with Turkmenistan President Saparmurat Niyazov here on Tuesday prior to leaving for Islamabad after the conclusion of his two-day visit—the first to a Central Asian State.

Gen Musharraf said: "We are engaging the Taliban and we do intend to persuade them to accept ceasefire and then proceed towards some formula for the resolution of the Afghanistan problem."

President Niyazov said the

position of Turkmenistan on Afghanistan was the same as that of Pakistan.

He said it was the responsibility of the neighbours to help resolve this very issue and added, "we will make joint efforts to facilitate the Afghan nation to solve this problem peacefully."

About his talks with Gen Pervez Musharraf, Mr Niyazov said, "we touched all aspects of bilateral relations" and also discussed Afghanistan.

Gen Musharraf said he admired the farsightedness of President Niyazov and his understanding on all issues. He said, "our special focus was on oil and gas and energy sector and we can further develop our ties and cooperation in this field."

He said that in communica-

tion sector, road and rail links could be established between Pakistan and Turkmenistan.

He said, "we have close collaboration in the defence sector and this will continue."

"We in Pakistan will develop infrastructure which will facilitate mutual benefits for Pakistan and Turkmenistan," he said.

President Niyazov said the both sides looked for ways to enhance cooperation.

He said: "We are aware of the difficulties for energy in the region, especially of Pakistan and India."

"We also discussed the possibility of exporting liquid gas to Pakistan," he said and added that gas would be exported to Pakistan. Electricity and oil products would also be sold to Pakistan, he added.—APP

DAWN
17 MAY 2000

DAWN

Pakistan, Afghanistan sign accord on DPs

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 17: Pakistan and Afghanistan on Wednesday agreed to set up a permanent joint commission and a special group to regulate cross-border movement, and to check the production and smuggling of narcotics respectively.

During the third day of negotiations between Pakistan Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider and Afghanistan Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razzaq Akhund, an agreement was also reached for the return of 100,000 Afghan refugees during the current year.

The negotiations which were

18 MAY 2000

ment on the issue of Afghan transit trade agreement (ATTA).

Pakistan officials expect the signing of an agreement, dropping at least 31 items from the ATTA list, between the two sides on Thursday.

On narcotics smuggling, according to sources, the Afghan team was told that Pakistan had been used as a conduit by traffickers for the supply of drugs, produced in Afghanistan, to the international market. Afghanistan, these sources said, promised to extend its full cooperation in checking the crime.

According to a government announcement, the Afghan side agreed to exchange information on smuggling of narcotics, to target stockpiles of opium and heroin laboratories.

"An agreement was also reached to set up a special group, comprising anti-narcotics officials of both the countries, to take specific steps to eradicate this menace," the announcement said.

They also agreed on the formation of a permanent joint commission to discuss and resolve any issue concerning cross-border movement and issuance of visas etc. It was decided to nominate a technical team of experts and surveyors to

demarcate the border at Qamruddin Karez.

It was also announced that 100,000 Afghan refugees would be repatriated to their homeland this year. It was disclosed at the meeting that the return of these refugees would be under a tripartite agreement among the United Nations and governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

According to the agreement the UNHCR would provide shelter and drinking water to the refugees returning to their homes in Afghanistan. Transport facility would also be provided to them.

Afghan delegation agreed to intensify efforts for the return of the refugees during coming years and said that the government of Afghanistan wanted their people to return to their homeland and take part in its reconstruction.

Mr Haider, however, said Pakistan expected the international community to help Afghanistan rebuild its infrastructure destroyed during their war with the former Soviet Union.

The two ministers were assisted by the ambassadors of both the countries and other senior officials. The representatives of Balochistan and NWFP governments were also included in the Pakistani team.

Pakistan, Taliban agree to enhance bilateral trade

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to convene technical committee for evolving a strategy to facilitate and promote bilateral trade, in particular, the transit trade to the land locked country.

This was decided in a meeting between visiting Afghan delegation and Commerce Minister Razaq Dawood that ended on an agreement to continue consultation pertaining to the revival of Afghan Transit Trade Agreement as early as possible.

The Technical Committee comprising officials concerned from both the sides would deliberate on the list of items to be allowed under, the revised ATTA. Pakistan side is pressing to allow not more than 18 items excluding luxury items like cosmetics while Afghans are asking for a list of 28 items to be permitted under the ATTA.

During the meeting, both the

NATION

19 MAY 2000

sides "explained views on operational aspects of the agreement and decided to continue consultation so as to evolve a viable strategy beneficial to both the countries," a Commerce Ministry official said.

The Commerce Minister reiterated that Pakistan was keen to help out Afghan brethren in their difficulties, the official said. The minister urged the need for frequent consultations to strengthen the cordial bilateral relations between the two Islamic countries, the official added.

The leader of the Afghan delegation, Interior Minister Abdul Razaq Akhund, pointed out Pakistani products have great potential in Afghan markets. He hoped that Pak-Afghan relations with particular reference to trade would grow fast with the passage of time.

US offered help on Osama

Bureau Report

ISLAMABAD, May 19: Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider on Friday offered to assist the United States in opening a dialogue with Afghan Taliban rulers on the issue of Osama bin Laden.

Speaking at a press conference here, he said: "Pakistan wants the issue to be resolved in direct talks between the United States and the Taliban militia."

Mr Moinuddin Haider said: "Pakistan's stand on Osama issue is very clear as we can assist in opening the talks."

The US wants Osama to stand trial in connection with 1998 bombings of American embassies in East Africa in which about 200 persons were killed. It wants Pakistan to use its influence with the Taliban on the issue.

He said the issue of Osama did not come under discussion during the talks with Afghan ministers when they were in Pakistan this week because it was not relevant to Pakistan.

STRIKE: Referring to the traders' strike, the interior minister said, "The government is

firm in its decision and will not drag its feet" with regard to traders' strike and said, "It does not bother us."

Mr Moinuddin Haider said the government was fair, both morally and legally, on the enforcement of the GST and it would not succumb to the traders' strike, which he termed as, "unfair" and a pressure tactic.

Answering a question, the minister said the traders must fulfil their obligations and contribute to the development of country by paying taxes.

"Traders are unfair to poor people of this country," the minister commented and claimed that the people were with the government on this issue.

He said the government was always ready to talk to traders, but made it clear that these talks would be aimed at the implementation of the GST at retail level. "If the GST can be enforced even in Bangladesh, then why not in Pakistan," he asked.

When asked about the impact of the strike, he said its effect could not be judged exactly because 80 per cent of the shops remained close on Fridays. He

said that some leaders of businessmen were issuing irresponsible statements like "we will die and kill but not pay taxes" which were not in the interest of the country.

Mr Haider said the GST had already been imposed on manufacturers and wholesalers. "Now we are asking the retailers to pay their share of the GST which is merely 2 to 3 per cent," he said.

He said the government wanted to reduce the federal as well as the provincial taxes.

On the killing of Maulana Yousuf Ludhianvi, the interior minister said it was "a sad incident and a cold-blooded murder of a respected scholar." He, however, said the government had not yet got any clue of the killers.

Referring to the riots in Karachi, he said he had asked the IG Police, Sindh, to ascertain whether the riots were a spontaneous response to Maulana's killing or if they were part of some conspiracy.

Answering another question, he said it would be premature to say as to who was behind the incident but he expressed the government's resolve to turn every stone in getting to the killers of the scholar.

When the minister's attention was drawn to religious parties/groups' demands including that Friday be declared as weekly holiday and the protection of Islamic provisions of the Constitution, Mr Haider said that each and every constitutional provision on Islam would remain intact and that the government had no intention to amend or scrap them.

DAWN

19 MAY 2000

No U-turn on any issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan

FO says Kabul has agreed to cooperate on terrorists, training camps: Nothing new on Osama

By Mobarik Virk

ISLAMABAD - The spokesman for the Foreign Office said in a briefing here Saturday afternoon that there is no diversion or U-turn on any issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He said that during the recent visit of the Afghan Interior Minister Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund, talks were held in cordial and frank atmosphere where both the sides explained their perspective freely.

"There is only a minor difference of opinion between the two sides on the Afghan Transit Trade. But it was agreed that discussions

will continue on the issues in future," the FO spokesman said.

He said that during the Afghan Interior Minister's visit to Islamabad three major issues were discussed which include: extradition of Pakistanis who have crossed over to Afghanistan after committing acts of terrorism in Pakistan, Afghan Transit Trade and the menace of smuggling and Osama bin Laden.

Extradition of Pakistani terrorists

On the issue of Pakistanis who have crossed over to Afghanistan after committing acts of terrorism

here the Afghan Interior Minister has extended cooperation as demanded by the Pakistan government. He said that there are some 10 to 12 such people who are wanted by Pakistan and the list of these persons has been provided to the Afghan Interior Minister.

Terrorist camps inside Afghanistan

About the terrorist training camps operating inside Afghanistan the Afghan Interior Minister said that he was not aware of any such camps. The FO spokesman

See page

NATION

21 MAY 2000

No U-turn on any issue

From page 1

said that these camps are not permanent establishments and these people involved in such activities are always on the move.

However, the FO spokesman said, the Afghan Interior Minister said that the Afghan government will not allow any such activity on its soil. "We will close these camps but you help us identify those," the FO spokesman quoted the Afghan Interior Minister as saying so.

Osama bin Laden issue

On the Osama bin Laden issue, the FO spokesman said that there is nothing new. "Our stand remains that it is an issue concerning directly Afghanistan and the United States. We want the two countries to resolve the issue through direct dialogues and efforts," the FO spokesman said.

Regarding the US demand of handing over Osama bin Laden so that he could be tried under their law the FO spokesman quoted Mullah Abdul Razaq Akhund as saying: "It is against our traditions. The situation is nothing new in Afghan history. In the past some 11 Nazi generals took refuge in Afghanistan after the World War II and they were accepted as guests."

"At that time as well Afghanistan faced most stringent econom-

ic sanctions from the world which made the lives of Afghan people miserable but we never handed those generals over to the people who were after them. However, it was only after our traditional 'Loya Jirga' decided that they were extradited," the FO spokesman quoted the Afghan Minister as saying.

In the situation the Afghan government said that the problem was actually created by the US itself which brought some 30,000 Arab youth to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet Union. "There are hundreds of graves of these Arabs in Afghanistan who laid down their lives while fighting against the Soviet Union," they said.

Secondly, the Afghans made a number of proposals to resolve the issue which were rejected by the US. These proposals include setting up a commission including members from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and another Muslim country to decide the fate of Osama bin Laden; or to set up an inquiry commission headed by the Afghan Chief Justice and the US should provide the charges against the man. In response the US only provided indictment but no evidence; or let the OIC delegation come and monitor Osama's movement.

The FO spokesman said, this is an issue between Afghanistan and the US and Pakistan is not involved in any way. He said that the US wants extradition of Osama bin Laden to a place where he should be 'brought to justice'.

Transit trade and smuggling

On the Afghan Transit Trade, where there is some difference of opinion between the two countries, the FO spokesman said that Pakistan is not willing to allow to include the 17 items it has banned whereas Afghanistan is pressing for it.

"The agreement on the Afghan Transit Trade was signed back in 1965 and the ban on the 17 items was imposed in 1985. The Afghans went into the Supreme Court against the decision and were provided relief."

"Now the ban has once again imposed on inclusion of these 17 items in the agreement by the Pakistan government because it believes that it is inflicting heavy damage to Pakistan's economy. According to the estimates prepared by the Central Board of Revenue (CBR) this damage is calculated to the tune of Rs. 10 billion per annum besides damaging the local industry. However, talks on this issue will continue in future," the FO spokesman said.

Pakistan supports Jeddha talks on Afghan issue

Pakistan-US security talks begin in June

NATION 23 MAY 2000

ISLAMABAD (Online) — Pakistan and United States will hold dialogue on security related and non-proliferation issues in June this year.

"Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar will represent Pakistan at the talks, beginning middle of June in United States", Foreign Office Spokesman Iftekhar Murshed said while talking to this agency here Monday.

This will be Abdul Sattar's first official visit to United States after assuming office of the Foreign Minister in October 1999.

Last round of talks was held some two years ago between the then Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott. The process was stalled since then and it had been decided during US President Bill Clinton's visit to Islamabad in March this year to resume the dialogue.

"Nuclear non-proliferation as well as peace and security in the region are some of the major issues to be discussed during the talks", the Spokesman said.

He said earlier, Foreign Secretary used to lead Pakistan delegation at the talks with Talbott but it had now been decided that the

Foreign Minister would represent the country at the parleys.

He said Pakistan side would apprise the US officials of measures including those of confidence building, proposed by it for promotion of non-proliferation as well as regional peace and stability.

It may be recalled that it was India, which did not respond positively to Pakistan's proposal about Strategic Restraint Regime, made during Islamabad round of Foreign Secretary level talks in October 1998.

It is expected that issue of Command and Control System and ways to eliminate specter of nuclear and missile proliferation will also come under intensive discussion. Availing the opportunity to highlight centrality of the Kashmir issue and the need of its early settlement, Pakistan side will also make new proposals to handle security related and non-proliferation issues in an effective manner.

Regarding the Jeddah round of talks to solve the Afghan issue, Iftekhar Murshed said that Pakistan said it supported recent Jeddah round of talks between Taliban and Northern Alliance as per its policy to back all efforts aimed at restoration of a durable peace in Afghanistan.

"We are glad to note Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), including those about exchange of the prisoners of war, were taken in the last round of Afghan talks", the spokesman.

He said Pakistan would continue to support any negotiations, conducted anywhere for restoration of a durable peace in war-shattered Afghanistan.

Responding to a question about the misunderstanding created after a recent statement by the Foreign Office on the issue of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, the Spokesman said he was misquoted by a section of Urdu press adding that there is and will be no change in Pakistan's position on the issue.

"Osama issue is a problem between United States and Afghanistan and it is for the two countries to resolve it through dialogue", Murshed emphatically said.

"There is and will be no change in our policy on the issue", the Spokesman stressed and added Pakistan was against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. He said bin Laden was neither living in Pakistan's territory nor was he a Pakistani national and this was a problem between Taliban and United States.

Pakistan to export wheat to Afghanistan

By Our Correspondent

ISLAMABAD, May 20: It to request Pakistan for the import of 15,000 tons of wheat. The Pakistan government had accepted its request and allowed has exported 15,000 tons of the commodity, worth about Rs8 million, to its neighbour.

The sources said, however, Afghanistan would pay the cost of imported wheat in the local currency.

To a question, the sources said, unlike the established practice, no L/C was opened by the Afghan government in Pakistan banks for wheat import.

Meanwhile, the sources disclosed that the Pakistan High Commissioner to Harare had informed the government that Zimbabwe was expected to face an acute shortage of wheat. The high commissioner pointed out that Zimbabwean authorities were interested in immediate import of the commodity from Pakistan which had harvested a bumper crop of over 21 million tonnes.

The Zimbabwean govt has also asked Pakistan to give special facilities and price of the commodity as early as possible so that import order may be placed.

High-level sources said it was also for the first time that Pakistan had exported wheat from its indigenous resources. The sources in the federal government claimed on Saturday that Pakistan was also likely to export wheat to Zimbabwe.

They said the export of wheat at the government level was a major achievement for Pakistan as in the past it had been pressing Afghan authorities to import the commodity through legal channels.

But Afghanistan had always been reluctant to use these official avenues for various reasons, including smuggling of the commodity.

Pakistan has recently tightened security at the border to check wheat and flour smuggling to Afghanistan.

The sources said Afghanistan was facing drought-like situation for the last couple of years and had almost no wheat to feed its population. This had compelled

See also Page 19

DAWN

23 MAY 2000

NATION

01 MAY 2000

RAWA stages anti-Taliban demonstration in Washington

WASHINGTON (NNI) - More than 100 women activists of Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) staged a demonstration in Washington, condemning the fundamentalist take over of Afghanistan in 1992.

RAWA members, for the first time in US, held a press conference at the scene and revealed the latest reports on the atrocities by the Taliban rulers against the people of Afghanistan, in particular Afghan women.

RAWA also discussed the ways which international community particularly American people and US government can assist Afghan people.

A representative from Senator Reid's (D-NV) office delivered a message to the crowd on behalf of the senator. In his message, Senator Reid condemned the Taliban atrocities and violations against women of Afghanistan.

Senator Reid commended RAWA for their leadership in struggle for independence, de-

mocracy, freedom and women's rights in Afghanistan. The Senator said: "United States must take a more active role in resolving the crises in Afghanistan. The people of Afghanistan, especially its women and girls who have suffered so much, deserve freedom and democracy."

In a Statement by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), she thanked RAWA as the oldest women's organization in Afghanistan.

She emphasized that "we should support RAWA and recognize the importance of their work for Afghan women." Congresswoman Meloney said: "To the women of Afghanistan, I say, We remember you. We will not forget you, we will fight for you!"

RAWA members in their resolution criticized US government for its support to the Taliban and Afghan jihad groups urging Washington to play its role to bring the Taliban and Jihadis leaders to the international court

as the most brutal and inhuman war criminals against women.

RAWA also advised US not to give asylum to any fundamentalist as well as Parchami and Khalqi traitors.

RAWA urged the US to send relief aid to Afghan people in the southern and northern provinces however the assistance should be given to the people without the least involvement of the Taliban and Jihadis.

RAWA said: "The people of Afghanistan want democracy and freedom.

Women's rights can not fully be in place unless we have a democratic government. After all Women's rights are human rights. We want respect for human rights and dignity in Afghanistan. Therefore, we want to tell the world that we do not want any intervention of any country. Therefore we ask United States and the world community to recognize our struggle for freedom and let the Afghan nation take control of their destiny."

Moscow warning to destabilize region: FO

ISLAMABAD May 23: Pakistan has said that Russia's reported warning to launch air strikes on suspected anti-Russian guerrilla training camps in Afghanistan, will have destabilizing impact on the region.

Foreign office spokesman Iftikhar Murshed told newsmen at a briefing here on Tuesday that the Taliban had assured Pakistan that they would "not allow the use of Afghan soil for any hostile activity against any country."

The spokesman was commenting on Monday's statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, who alleged that the Taliban was providing military support to Chechen guerrillas.

The spokesman said Afghan interior minister Mullah Razaq Akhund during his visit to Islamabad last week had quoted Mullah Umar as having declared that Afghanistan was against terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations" and would not allow anyone to use Afghan territory for hostile acts against any country.

CE's VISITS: To a question Mr Murshed said Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf would lead a delegation to Teheran to attend the Economic Cooperation Organization summit there on June 10.

He would also pay a two-day visit to Oman from June 11. The chief executive during his stay in Teheran will meet the Iranian President and other heads of states.

The CE will some time later visit Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, he added.

He also confirmed that Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar would visit Washington in mid-June to hold talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot, focusing on issues relating to regional peace and security, Pakistan-India relations and the nuclear question.

The spokesman said that the US undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering would also visit Islamabad from May 25 to

28 to hold talks with Foreign Secretary Inamul Haq on a host of issues. He would also call on Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar, Murshed said.

Mr Pickering was likely to make a call on Chief Executive Gen Pervez Musharraf, he added.

The spokesman said a four-member committee of the OIC Afghanistan contact group was expected to meet in Islamabad on Wednesday to sort out the bottlenecks in the implementation of the confidence-building measures as agreed at the Jeddah meeting last month.

The meeting of the so-called trouble-shooting committee, comprising Pakistan, Iran, the OIC and the UN, would consider the issues holding follow up action on the CBMs agreed by the rival Afghan warring groups' at the Jeddah meeting, the spokesman added.

As a consequence of the hold up in implementation of the CBMs, the scheduled meeting of the group in Pakistan during the first week of June, has been postponed following a telephonic call on Tuesday, from Iranian special envoy Tahirian to his Pakistani counterpart at a date to be finalised later.—HA

AFP adds: The FO spokesman said Pakistan would act in the best interests of its national security if India carried out further nuclear tests, leaving open the possibility of a matching response.

MR Murshed made the statement while commenting on reports in the Indian press that New Delhi was preparing to conduct further nuclear tests.

The reports also said Pakistani foreign secretary Inamul Haq had gone to Beijing to seek Chinese support in preparing for a response if India were to make new tests.

"Let me categorically deny it," Murshed said adding that Mr Haq's visit was part of regular consultations between Pakistan and China, who maintained an all weather friendship.

USSR disintegration changed— US policy towards Afghanistan

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — Abdul Wali Khan has said that America has no interests in Afghanistan, as the former Soviet Unions had broken into pieces.

"I didn't see any change in the American policies towards former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif or sitting Chief Executive Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

If the later had failed in following the USA agenda then his fate will not be different from the earlier," he remarked while answering to a question during a Press conference at Wali Bagh Charsada on Thursday.

Wali Khan had made his best to confine himself to internal rifts among the ANP ranks but he was compelled to say something about regional and national politics.

"Americans are worried about Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and

its development will harm the authority of West," he added.

He said that Nawaz Sharif was backed by US for some specific purposes and when they were achieved it removed him. Advocating in favour of his point of view, he reminded that Nawaz Sharif had got an historical mandate in 1997 elections, but he misused the power for personal interests.

He recalled that during a meeting on October 10, 1999 he had told the PML leadership to remain alert but it failed to understand.

After the nuclear tests the USA took more interests in the regional politics to protect its interests. Wali Khan has urged India and Pakistan to resolve Kashmir issue through talks.

He said that terrorists training centres should be closed down in Afghanistan. This is one of the US

demands from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

He said the West has imposed sanctions against Afghanistan because of terrorist training centres. He called upon the religious groups to help control the terrorism.

When asked about the future of the country, Wali Khan said though the political situation in the country is not stable however the time will make the things clear.

He said Pervez Musharraf does not know, where he is leading the country.

He observed that politicians can take the country out of the present crisis, therefore, the army should restore the democracy. Wali Khan said that they are political people and believe in political approach for resolving the issues.



ANP leader Wali Khan addressing a Press conference in Charsada on Thursday.—Staff photo by Tariq Aziz

Donors warn Afghans against fresh fighting

18 MAY 2000
NATION

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - Expressing alarm at reports of eruption of fighting, donors to Afghanistan have warned the warring factions that hostilities could endanger efforts to generate additional aid for the war-ravaged country.

In a demarche to the Afghan factions, the Afghan Support Group (ASG) said that aid to Afghanistan could stop if fighting breaks out.

Text of the letter was issued to the Press by the United Nations office in Islamabad on Wednesday.

"The resumption of large-scale hostilities by the warring parties will jeopardize efforts to generate additional aid for Afghanistan, as well as the prospects of future rehabilitation and development assistance," the letter said.

The warning came as Taliban and the opposition northern alliance engage in heavy fighting at the advent of Summer and the snow-clogged mountain passes open up.

Mullah Abdul Razaq, Taliban Interior Minister said at a recent press conference in Kabul that the

opposition would be eliminated this year.

Taliban had launched a major offensive last year and had reached at the mouth of the strategic Panjshir Valley, the stronghold of opposition commander Ahmed

Abbas, Razaq discuss drought in Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (APP) - Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas, Abbas Sarfraz Khan discussed here with the Afghan Interior Minister, Mulla Abdul Razaq Akhund, the drought situation in Afghanistan and return of Afghan refugees to their motherland.

Abbas told the Afghan minister, who called on him that Pakistan government was fully aware of the drought situation in the neighbouring Afghanistan.

He assured all possible assistance by Pakistan on humanitarian grounds to the Afghans to fight drought miseries.

Shah Masood, known as Lion of Panjshir. However Masood forces had pushed the Taliban fighters out of Shomali Plains, north of Kabul.

"The donor community is particularly concerned that considerable human, material and financial resources are devoted to the war effort while a severe drought is affecting a large part of the country," the ASG letter said.

"The potential for large-scale human tragedy, including the loss of lives and livelihoods, exists," it added.

The UN has found it increasingly difficult to generate international aid for Afghanistan. In the last two years the UN has failed to get even 50 per cent of the money it requested.

The warning was issued in a letter sent Tuesday to both the Taliban, who rule 90 per cent of Afghanistan, and the opposition, who control the remaining 10 per cent.

In their letter, the donors say there are reports that both sides in the conflict are preparing for all-out war.

Canadian team, Taliban discuss drugs, terrorism

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - The Afghan Foreign Minister, Mawlawi Wakil Ahmed Mawlawi and the visiting Canadian delegation discussed prevailing political conditions and development in Afghanistan and regions with narcotics and human rights.

The Canadian delegation headed by the Canadian Ambassador, High Commissioner to the Afghan Minister of State for External Affairs, said that the visit is aimed at holding talks with the authorities of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and inspecting the Afghan situation and supplies to the desert.

Mawlawi threatened to open political changes and development. The Foreign Minister also spoke about the policy of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on drugs, terrorism and human rights. The Minister invited the Canadian aid during the Afghan Chad and continuation of humanitarian assistance in the prevailing conditions.

German envoy visits Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - German Ambassador to Pakistan, Hans Joachim Damm, visited Afghanistan at the conclusion of his four-day visit to Afghanistan.

The German Ambassador, along with his family members, flew back to Islamabad in a UN plane, which also brought an Afghan delegation, led by Afghan Interior Minister Mulla Abdul Razaq.

Diplomatic sources say that the German Ambassador was very keen to visit Afghanistan as very serious situation in the war-ravaged country.

Despite leaving Afghan people in lurch, most of the Islamabad-based Western diplomats are keen to visit Afghanistan. The country's parliament is also discussing the visit to Afghanistan.

NATION

02 MAY 2000

15 MAY 2000
NATION

Donors hint at stoppage of aid

18 MAY 2000
DAWN

that considerable human, material and financial resources were devoted to war effort while a severe drought was affecting a large part of the country.

It said the primary responsibility for dealing with the consequences of drought rested with the authorities that controlled those areas.

"These authorities are, therefore, urged to immediately reallocate the resources used for military activities to provision of urgently needed food and other assistance to the drought-affected populations.

"United Nations and non-governmental agencies providing assistance to (the) civilians affected by war or drought must be allowed to operate according to internationally-recognized principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence," the demarche stressed, adding "authorities must facilitate their work and respect the rights of communities in need, wherever they may be, to receive assistance. International assistance must be provided on the basis of assessed need; it cannot be subjected to any form of discrimination or political pressures".

It said the donor community

remained committed to providing assistance to alleviate the suffering of the drought victims. The resumption of large-scale hostilities by the warring parties will, however, jeopardize its efforts.

As prescribed by the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan, such assistance will only be provided if it was part of an overall effort to achieve peace and if it could be determined that no direct or political advantage would be accrued by either of the warring parties.

Asked for Pakistan's comments, the Foreign Office spokesman told *Dawn* that Islamabad had already made known that Pakistan regarded it in its own national interest and in the interest of all concerned if a durable peace could be restored in Afghanistan.

It was pointed out that the Organization of Islamic Conference, too, at its last meeting in Saudi Arabia had hoped that the parties in Afghanistan would not raise the level of hostilities in June — the month that marked elevated levels of fighting in the past — and that they would continue to work for establishing durable peace in Afghanistan.

Donors warn Afghan fighting puts aid at risk

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - Major donors have warned renewed fighting in Afghanistan will jeopardize humanitarian assistance for the war-torn country, the United Nations said Tuesday.

The warning comes in a demarche addressed on Tuesday by the chairman of the Afghanistan Support Group (ASG) to the ruling Taliban and the Afghanist'ern Alliance.

The donors urged the warring sides for a reallocate of fighting resources used for a war effort to provisions for the civilians and other assistance to the people threatened by severe drought which is creating a large scale human tragedy.

The donor countries are:

The donor community 'remains committed to providing life-saving assistance for the drought-stricken population, it said.

The resumption of large-scale hostilities by the warring parties will, however, jeopardize efforts to generate additional aid resources for Afghanistan as well as the prospects of future rehabilitation and development assistance, the programme warned.

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NATION

18 MAY 2000

NATION 04 MAY 2000



ZABUL: An Afghan head of a nomad (Kuchi) family prepares to leave along with his cattle in drought-hit Shinkay village south of Qalat, southern province of Afghanistan.-AFP



KANDAHAR: An armed Taliban militia soldier sits beside a field ready to be harvested in Kandahar province.-AFP

NATION 11 MAY 2000

NATION 12 MAY 2000



Due to raise in Afghan currency the money dealers conducting currency business on footpath in Peshawar.-Staff photo



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider shakes hands with his Afghan counterpart, Mulla Abdur Razaq Akhund, before their one-to-one meeting here on Monday.—AFP

DAWN 16 MAY 2000

NATION

18 MAY 2000



Mullah Abdul Razzaq Akund, Interior Minister of Afghanistan, called on President Rafiq Tarar at the Aiwan-e-Sadr Islamabad, on Wednesday.

NATION

16 MAY 2000



Federal Minister Lt Gen. (Retd) Moin-ud-Din Haider talking to Afghan Interior Minister Mulla Abdul Razzaq Akhund in Islamabad on Monday.



Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar receiving his Afghan counterpart at the Foreign Office on Tuesday.

NATION

17 MAY 2000

Opposition accuse Taliban of massacring prisoners

KABUL (AFP) - The Afghan opposition Sunday accused the ruling Taliban of massacring 198 prisoners after the warring factions reached an agreement on a prisoner swap this week in Saudi Arabia.

A senior spokesman for the anti-Taliban key commander Ahmad Shah Masood said the prisoners, most of them of fighting age, were taken out of jails in northern Afghanistan, shot dead and buried in mass graves.

The Taliban authorities denied the opposition claim.

'On Thursday May 11 the Taliban took out 198 people from the jails in Sheberghan, Mazar-i-Sharif and Samangan and massacred them,' said the spokesman, Abdullah, who uses only one name.

'They buried them in mass graves in Robatak pass and at the foot of Chaghar mountain of Samangan, and Gul Mohammad hill in Mazar-i-Sharif,' Abdullah said.

Most of them were from the Afghan ethnic groups of Hazara and Uzbek, he said, warning that the 'massacre' would give a new twist to the Afghan 20-year crisis.

Abdullah said the Taliban killed the prisoners because they were not willing to swap them as part of the agreement both sides reached at the Saudi Red Sea port city of Jeddah under the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) this week.

The Taliban religious militia, which controls most of the country, is battling Masood, who remains the last obstacle to the Islamic militia's ambition to take control of the entire country.

'This is our impression that the Taliban thought that the prisoner swap might happen, so they thought it was better to kill them before hand,' he said.

Taliban Information Minister Qudratullah Jamal strongly dis-

missed the opposition claim as a manoeuvre to avoid the envisaged prisoner swap.

'This is absolutely untrue. They want to portray their own position as ours,' he said.

'According to our Islamic policy, no body has been harmed. The opposition are trying to find a way to delay the exchange process and put the blame on us.'

He said that the Taliban Supreme Leader Mulla Mohammad Omar had issued a special decree ordering the authorities not to ill-treat the prisoners.

Jamal told AFP the Taliban were very 'keen and serious' on the prisoners swap, accusing the opposition of putting the Taliban prisoners to forced labour.

Though it is difficult to know the exact total of prisoners, conservative estimates put the number held by each side at thousands. The two have swapped prisoners in the past under individually arranged exchanges.

Afghan leader says he fled to Iran alone

TEHRAN, May 21: Afghan opposition leader Ismail Khan, who escaped from a Taliban jail in Kandahar, says he fled into Iran alone by disguising himself as a member of the militia, according to an account published on Saturday.

"As I knew that my freedom would need to be approved by the Taliban along with the Pakistanis, I decided to act alone," Mr Khan told *Ghods*, a conservative newspaper published in the northeast Iranian city of Mashhad.

Mr Khan, a former governor of western Afghanistan's Herat province, was a close ally of Burhanuddin Rabbani, whose government in Kabul was ousted by the Taliban in 1996. Mr Khan fled to Iran in 1995 but returned to Afghanistan and was jailed by the Taliban in May 1997.

Mr Khan told the newspaper that he was captured by a man named Malik, who had invited him as a guest then handed him over to the Taliban, on payment of \$10 million by Pakistan.—

AFP

Afghan Opposition commander defects to Taliban

ISLAMABAD (NNI) - An Afghan opposition commander has defected to the ruling Taliban militia along with 200 fighters, reported the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) on Thursday.

Maulvi Mohammad Zahir, once governor of the northern Afghan province of Samangan under the government of former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, joined the Taliban on the frontlines in northern Kunduz province on Wednesday, AIP said.

Taliban threat to regional peace, says Masood

KABUL (Online) - Ahmed Shah Masood, leader of Northern Alliance of Afghanistan, has once again warned against the 'danger posed by Taliban' to the countries of the region.

In an interview with a Tajikistan newspaper, he said Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) should be vigilant towards the expansionist designs of Taliban regime, reports Radio Tehran.

He alleged that Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan would not end because some of the groups had planned to extend their activities to Central Asia for which they relied on Taliban.

NATION 15 MAY 2000

NATION

NATION

19 MAY 2000

NATION

29 MAY 2000

DAWN

22 MAY 2000

Afghan peace talks delayed

JEDDAH (AFP) - Afghan peace talks sponsored by the Saudi-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) have been put off by a day until Monday, the OIC said.

It said the arrival of the opposition delegation in the Red Sea city of Jeddah for a second round of peace talks since March was delayed until late Sunday.

A delegation from the Taliban militia which holds power in Kabul, meanwhile, met with Ibrahim Baker, the OIC deputy secretary general for political affairs, the 55-member organisation said.

The indirect peace talks, due to last four days, coincide with a visit to Saudi Arabia by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar, who met on Sunday with the OIC secretary general, Ezzedin Laraki.

They held talks on the situation in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

In a first round of Afghan peace talks in March, the Taliban, who control around 80 per cent of Afghanistan, and a delegation from the opposition coalition met separately with OIC officials in Jeddah for three days.

But the talks made no progress and the OIC failed to sit the two sides together around the same table.

The Taliban militia's administration is recognised only by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The forces of ousted President Burhanuddin Rabbani under ex-defence minister Ahmad Shah Massoud continue to defy the Islamic militia north of Kabul and in the mountainous northeast.

Afghan peace talks begin in Jeddah today

JEDDAH, May 7: Afghan peace talks, sponsored by the Saudi-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), have been put off by a day until Monday, the OIC said.

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The indirect peace talks, due to last four days, coincide with a visit to Saudi Arabia by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar, who met on Sunday with the OIC secretary general, Ezzedin Laraki.

They held talks on the situation in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

In a first round of Afghan peace talks in March, the Taliban and a delegation from the opposition coalition met separately with OIC officials in Jeddah for three days. But the talks made no progress and the OIC failed to sit the two sides together around the same table.—AFP

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Afghan groups indirect talks in Saudi Arabia

JEDDAH (AFP) - Afghanistan's warring factions resumed a new round of indirect peace talks in Saudi Arabia sponsored by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Monday, the OIC said.

A delegation of the Taliban militia which holds power in Kabul, led by Mulla Amir Khan Mutaqui, held talks with Ibrahim Bakr, the OIC deputy secretary general for political affairs.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, whose country holds the chair of the OIC, and the UN envoy on Afghanistan, Francesco Vendrell, also took part along with envoys of Pakistan and Tunisia, members of an OIC committee on Afghanistan.

Later Monday, the same team met at OIC headquarters in the Red Sea city of Jeddah with a delegation of the Afghan opposition

coalition, whose delayed arrival held up the talks initially due to start on Sunday.

The charge d'affaires at the Afghan embassy in Riyadh, who was in the Taliban delegation, told AFP they asked for the United Nations and OIC to work to halt foreign interference in Afghanistan.

The Taliban also called on the mediators 'to halt the war waged by the opposition and help the central government to establish its rule,' Mouloud Abdelwahab said.

He proposed a dialogue on an exchange of prisoners, 'which would help create a climate of trust between the two parties'.

A similar round of indirect Afghan peace talks was held in Jeddah for three days in March. But they made no progress and the OIC failed to sit the two sides together around the same table.

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6 persons killed in Taliban's artillery shelling in Kunar

ISLAMABAD (NNI) — At least six people were killed as a result of Taliban's heavy artillery shelling on the opposition bunkers in eastern Afghan province of Kunar, reports Radio Tehran.

A spokesman of the opposition northern alliance and former Governor Nangarhar province Haji Abdul Qadeer told Radio Tehran that the alliance forces carried out series of operations in the eastern province damaging six Taliban's posts.

He said that commander Jandad Khan led the operation. These

posts, Qadeer said, were recently established by the Taliban in Babaro Tangi in Narang district.

Qadeer, however, did not mention the casualties on the part of the Taliban and said that a pick up of the student militia was also destroyed during the operation.

Meanwhile, Director General of the office for foreign refugees and immigrants, Yusuf said as many as 1000 Afghan refugees voluntarily returned to Afghanistan from Hurmazgan province of Iran.

Yusuf said that the repatriation

of the Afghan refugees has started following the accord signed by the Iranian government and UN High Commissioner for Refugees for the purpose.

He said that the repatriation programme would continue for six months, reported Radio Tehran on Sunday.

Nearly 5,000 Afghan refugees went back to the war-ravaged Afghanistan from Iran last month. Yusuf said that all these refugees did not possess documents but added that they voluntarily returned home.

12 killed in clashes between Taliban, dacoits

From Our Correspondent

PESHAWAR — As many as 12 persons have been killed as a result of clashes between Taliban soldiers and alleged dacoits on the border between Afghanistan and Iran.

The reports from Afghanistan reveal that alleged dacoits have made a din at Honeyrod area of Farah province in Afghanistan, for forcibly collecting taxes from the traders and businessmen. In this connection, Taliban leaders have received several complaints from the affected persons.

Taliban authorities on Saturday initiated a crackdown against the dacoits. Instead of surrendering to Taliban, dacoits started firing on Taliban soldiers. The clashes continued for around nine hours. As a result one dozen criminals were killed and one identified Mualim Akhtar was arrested alive.

The Taliban authorities have captured four vehicles, four artillery, two rocket launchers, 17 klashnikov and one wireless set into custody. Such a gang of criminals was known for taxing the traders in all over Farah, Nimroz and Herat provinces, bordering with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Four killed in Taliban attack on Takhar base

KABUL, May 21: Four civilians were killed and two others wounded as Taliban jet fighters attacked a key opposition stronghold in the northeastern province of Takhar, opposition officials said on Sunday.

The air raids late Saturday destroyed at least two houses in the provincial capital Taloqan, said Abdullah, a spokesman for the northern alliance forces, led by former defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood.

Abdullah said he believed the bombing was a prelude to an imminent Taliban offensive in Parwan province abutting Takhar.

He said the ruling militia had deployed some 3,000 Taliban fighters on the so-called Old Road frontlines north of Kabul to attack Masood's positions in

Parwan.

"Their attack from the Old Road is expected to start soon," Abdullah told AFP on a satellite telephone.

He, however, warned: "If there is a plan to attack, there is a plan to defend naturally."

He conceded that Taliban soldiers had advanced seven kilometres (four miles) on the northern side of the strategic Salang Tunnel, 120 kilometres north of Kabul.

The opposition spokesman on Friday claimed that the Taliban had launched a massive assault in the Salang area but their advance had been halted.

No independent confirmation was immediately available and Taliban officials offered no comment.—AFP

Heavy fighting erupts in north Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD (AFP) - A new round of fighting erupted in northern Afghanistan on Monday as opposition forces launched a counter-attack against Taliban troops in the northern Salang area, a report here said.

The pre-dawn attack mounted by the forces of opposition commander Ahmad Shah Masood was 'very heavy,' the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) reported.

'Both sides are using tanks and artillery,' the Pakistan-based private news service said putting the combined casualty toll at six dead and eight wounded.

It said the fighting was intense but the frontlines remained 'unchanged' and so far the opposition forces had made 'no advance.'

Independent confirmation of the report was not immediately available.

Opposition spokesman Suhail Assem accused the Taliban of launching what he called a renewed attack on Monday against Masood's positions to the north of

Salang pass.

He said the early morning attack continued for a couple of hours, adding 'they attacked our positions with rockets and shells.'

Taliban troops tried to capture mountaintops overlooking the strategic Salang Tunnel, 120 kilometers (75 miles) north of Kabul but 'there was no change in the frontlines and the attack was repulsed,' he added.

AIP said the opposition retaliation came three days after an offensive by the ruling Taliban militia in the northern region of the Salang tunnel.

Masood's troops attacked the Taliban positions from the hills overlooking the nearby Baghlan province, the report said, adding that the Taliban held Baghlan city and also controlled a road leading to the Salang area.

AIP said the fighting was mainly concentrated in northern Salang area where the Taliban fighters had advanced several kilometers following their offensive on Friday.

Taliban make gains in north

PESHAWAR, May 19: The Taliban militia has captured vast areas in two days of fighting with the opposition in the northern Baghlan province, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) agency reported on Friday.

The Taliban made these gains in the province's Salang hills, on the northern side of the Hindukush mountain range, AIP quoted unidentified sources as saying. It said the fighting raged overnight and the whole day on Friday.

Taliban authorities in Kabul and Kandahar expressed ignorance of the fighting in which 11 people were killed on both sides, AIP said.

Anti-Taliban commander Ahmed Shah Masood, meanwhile, launched an offensive against the Taliban forces in the east of the Do Shee area in Baghlan province, it reported.

Masood's attack was possibly aimed at relieving Taliban pressure on the strategic Salang front. A pass and road tunnel located in the Salang mountains connects Kabul with Afghanistan's north.—dpa

4 killed in Taliban jet attack on Opp base

KABUL (AFP) - Four civilians were killed and two wounded as jet fighters of Afghanistan's ruling Taliban attacked a key opposition stronghold in the northeastern province of Takhar, opposition officials said Sunday.

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CONTENTS

Pages: 66

Afghanistan:

News Analyses	1
Women	5
UFISA	6
Peace Talks	7
Fighting	8
Comments	11
General	13

Afghan Govt./ Kabul:

Political Aspects	21
Diplomatic Activities	25
General	32

Refugees:

Repatriation	34
General	36

Foreign Interest:

UN	38
US	42
Russian	45
OIC/AI	49
Libya	50
Iran	51
Pakistan	53
General	62
Photos	64

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— Top Stories —

Moscow's Threat To Kabul

Page 2



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